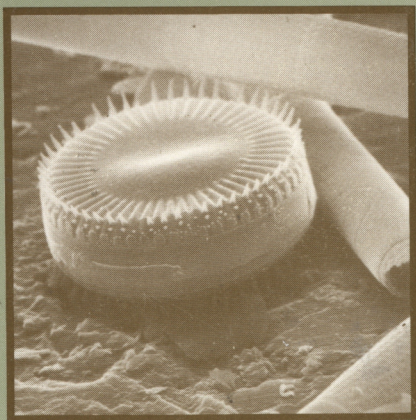
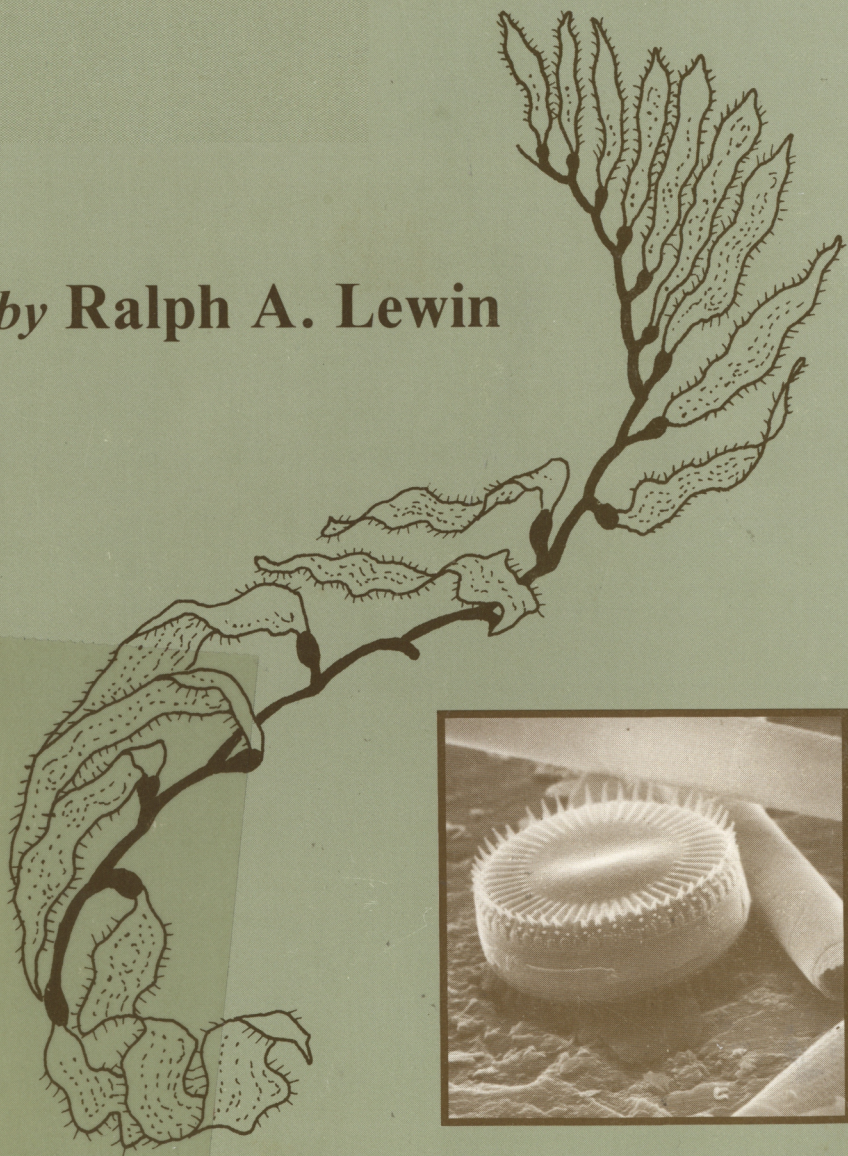


*The
Biology of Algae
and
Diverse Other Verses*

by Ralph A. Lewin



When men are short of science,
they stretch to Poetry.

—*Charles Darwin*

* * *

. . . his poetry's made up of botany
and wide margins and indecency
in about equal proportions.

—*James Branch Cabell*

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and
Diverse Other Verses

by
Ralph A. Lewin

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Quid pro quo

By some supreme reciprocating plan,
Our God created mountain-tops and trees,
Fossils and fishes, animals and man—
And we created fables such as these.

PREFACE

Most of my other publications are shorter than this one. They generally begin with a *Summary*, and proceed through an *Introduction* to sections on *Materials and Methods*, *Results*, *Discussion*, *Acknowledgments*, and *Bibliography*. For this book, compiled from similar elements but presented in a less formal manner, there can be no general *Summary*, and I cannot hope to write a satisfactory Introduction.

The reader is invited to start on page one and to go on browsing through the verses until he gets hungry or bored, or the 'phone rings.

—*Ralph A. Lewin*

La Jolla, California
January 1978

* * *

PREFACE TO REVISED and EXPANDED EDITION

Ten years (almost) have passed and I have accumulated some odd thoughts and made notes here and there, which like the ones in the first edition, do not lend themselves to the formal construction of true science. So the old ones, integrated with the new ones, are presented here with the same suggestion to browse through until something happens in the society that could be more important.

—*Ralph A. Lewin*

La Jolla, California
December 1987

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The Biology of Algae *

The biology of algae is a duty, or a task,
That consumes the better portion of your time
In the sampling of waters from an ocean, or a flask,
Or a snow-field, or a gutter-full of slime.
You get cold, and wet, and grubby; you get dusty, hot, and dry;
You get dismal, and dejected, and defied;
But you'll find that, if you're lucky—if you're good—and if you try,
You can do a little science on the side.

The biology of algae is a pastime, or an art,
That embodies a diversity of skill:
How to mend a pH meter which has somehow come apart,
Or to regulate a microscope or still;
How to edit a proposal, or a chapter of a book;
How to float upon the academic tide;
How to teach a fellow creature how to speak, or how to cook,
And a little bit of science on the side.

The biology of algae is a virtue, or a vice,
That entails some tricky searching of the soul.
It involves the growth of fishes, and the harvesting of rice,
And pollution, and the origins of coal.
It may get us into trouble; it may get us into space;
Its dilemmas are as long as they are wide.
It involves some moral judgements on the future of our race—
And a little bit of science on the side.

* R. A. L. 1971. *Phycol. Newsletter* 7:1.

In the beginning *

In the beginning the earth was all wet;
We hadn't got life—or ecology—yet.
There were lava and rocks—quite a lot of them both—
And oceans of nutrient Oparin broth.
But then there arose, at the edge of the sea,
Where sugars and organic acids were free,
A sort of a blob in a kind of a coat—
The earliest protero-prokaryote.
It grew and divided: it flourished and fed;
From puddle to puddle it rapidly spread
Until it depleted the ocean's store
And nary an acid was found any more.

Now, if one considered that terrible trend,
One might have predicted that that was the end—
But no! In some sunny wee lochan or slough
Appeared a new creature—we cannot say how.
By some strange transition that nobody knows,
A photosynthetical alga arose.
It grew and it flourished where nothing had been
Till much of the land was a blue shade of green
And bubbles of oxygen started to rise
Throughout the world's oceans, and filled up the skies;
While, off in the antediluvian mists,
Arose a few species with heterocysts
Which, by a procedure which no-one can tell,
Fixed gaseous nitrogen into the cell.

As the gases turned on and the gases turned off,
There emerged a respiring young heterotroph.
It grew in its turn, and it lived and it throve,
Creating fine structure, genetics, and love,
And, using its enzymes and oxygen-2,
Produced such fine creatures as *coli* and you.

* R. A. L. 1977. *Biologist (J. Inst. Biol.)* 24:10.

This, then, is the story of life's evolution
From Oparin broth to the final solution.
So, prokaryologists, dinna forget:
We've come a long way since the world was all wet.
We owe a great deal—you can see from these notes--
To photosynthetical prokaryotes.

My Ladye, Green Weeds

O, I have labour'd late and long
Researching in phycology,
And I must sing in simple song
My ladye, Chlorophyceae.

Green weeds are all my joy
And green weeds are my delight.
Green weeds are my latest toy—
My lovely algae, green weeds.

O green algae absorb the light
Replete with chlorophylls a and b,
And green algae are my delight—
My ladye, Chlorophyceae.

Green weeds are my passion now;
With green weeds my heart's afire.
Green weeds are my all, I trow—
My lovely algae, green weeds.

A Mournful Roundelay

E'er the sunrise, come with me
Where the waves are foaming free.

Leave your warm and cozy bed
E'er the fogs of night have fled;
Seek we algae, brown and red—
Seek we algae by the sea.

At the breaking of the day,
Yonder lies our misty way.

What though morning mists prevail—
Biting wind, or howling gale—
Stride we forth, with clanking pail,
Seeking algae in the spray.

At the dawn we haste away
Out to point and sandy bay.

None can know how cold we get;
None can feel as chill or wet.
We shall all be colder yet,
Seeking algae in the spray.

Questing minds must aye explore
What the oceans hold in store.

When the stormy tempests blow—
When the raging tides are low—
Comfort ye, and let us go
Seeking algae by the shore.

*Folksong About Moonshine Assimilation,
Or Something*

O, 'way out on the Bay
There's some chlorophyll a
Where the quanta of photons accrue;
And 'way out in the Sound
Where the plankton abound
There are algae that's fixin' CO₂.

They call it that good ol' CO₂,
And them that can fix it is few.
If you turn on a light
They can spend all the night
'Similatin' that good ol' CO₂.

It was Otto who said,
With a shake of his head,
"Let us see what Chlorella can do."
It can set up a store
Of three quanta, or four,
And can use them for fixin' CO₂.

They call it that good ol' CO₂,
(u.s.w.)

And then old Uncle Hans
Said we hadn't a chance
To extract an insoluble clue.
But they proved he was wrong—
As you'll learn from this song—
About fixin' that good ol' CO₂.

They call it that good ol' CO₂,
(etc.)

And then old Cousin Kees
Came and joined in the race
 With bacteria, red, white, and blue.
You don't have to be green—
If you see what I mean—
 To engage in the fixin' CO₂.

 They call it that good ol' CO₂
 (etc.)

And then poor Cousin Mel
Had to struggle like hell
 On the path where the carbon went through;
But, to no-one's surprise
He was 'warded a prize
 For his studies in fixin' CO₂.

 They call it that good ol' CO₂
 (etc.)

And then young Cousin Dan—
He's the kind of a man
 Who just wonders what extracts can do—
Found that chlorophyll juice
Was enough to reduce
 Just a smidgen of labelled CO₂.

 They call it that good ol' CO₂
 (etc.)

Now my Cousin André
Found an easier way—
 And we'll give the young fella his due.
He's lost most of his hair
Catchin' carbon from air
 In a system for fixin' CO₂.

They call it that good ol' CO₂
(etc.)

Now we've come to the stage
When such fixin's the rage—
And it seems not to matter by who.
If you give us a chance
We're as good as the plants
At the fixin' of good ol' CO₂.

They call it that good ol' CO₂;
It's a process that many can do.
If you'll turn off the light
We'll respire all the night,
Generatin' some more CO₂.

Lead Kindly, Stromatolite

When I grow old, let me retire
Beside a fossil-fuel fire
To warm my hands, or toast my rear,
By summer suns of yesteryear;
To sip the bitter-springs-and-lime
Of protokaryotic time,
My dreams of bygone sex confined
To spores of the subconscious mind.

And, when my final senses fail,
Then let my mortal clay (or shale)
For dim posterity be laid
Beneath a fig-tree's dappled shade
To hunt the primal cell no more,
Yet ever seeking, as of yore—
My rusty gunflint at my hand—
The bogs of Bungle-Bungle-land.

The Amebas

A myriad of tiny voices were heard outside the biology laboratory one Christmas season, singing the following words to the tune of "O Little Town of Bethlehem." Though it was apparent that, in order to make themselves heard at all, the carollers had to sing at the tops of their vacuoles, the cold weather had so lowered their respiration that many of the words were lost in the wind. The verses have been reconstructed as accurately as possible, however, and are here published for the first time.

O little pulsing bits of me,
We grieve to see you so,
While merrily, all wild and free,
We throng the soil below.

And we, who do not live alone,
Must sigh for you, above,
For you are grown in purest clone
And nothing know of love.

Your world is warm, and all aglow
With fluorescent light.
What can you know of soil and snow,
Of sun, or day and night?

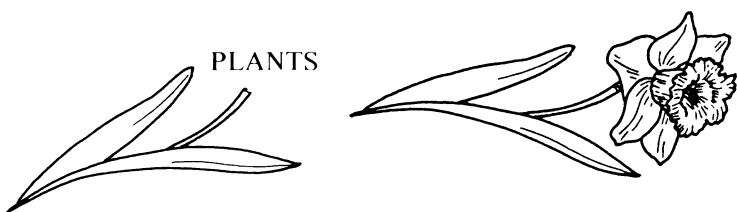
Oblivious of rain, you bask
Beneath a changeless sky;
In tube or flask, your single task
Is but to multiply.

Immured in pyrex walls you grow
In sugared broths and breis.
You little know that you must go
To face a warm demise.

Alas, poor sister protoplast,
 You little stop to think—
When all is past, you breathe your last
 In autoclave and sink.

O sisters, we were torn from you—
 By fission rent in twain.
And yet anew we split in two,
 To ne'er unite again.

We of the earth will not forget
 You who within abide.
Your fate is set in drain or Klett—
 We sigh for you, outside.



The Emerald Crystal Ball

When the tides are warm and low
Where the tropic sun has shone,
That is where we look for Pro-
chloron.

On the shores of Mexico,
Eniwetok and Ceylon
Lurk didemnids bearing Pro-
chloron.

There are things we ought to know—
Mysteries to think upon—
Problems that relate to Pro-
chloron.

How to get the cells to grow:
Media to grow them on—
These are what we need for Pro-
chloron.

Progress has been somewhat slow
Towards our chosen Rubicon:
How to tame the tiny Pro-
chloron.

* * *

Prince, if you desire to know
Where the last year's snows have gone
Peer into the heart of Pro-
chloron.

Kastanienbaum

Beneath the spreading chestnut tree
we study late and long
the humble Myxophyceae
in systems right or wrong.

They thrive in mud or watershed—
non-saline or marine
and vary from a purple-red
to shades of bluish-green.

Their only chlorophyll is *a*.
They flourish in the light.
They fix their CO₂ by day
and nitrogen by night.

Some cells are sheathed or capsulate;
some lack all forms of dress,
but, sexless, do not hesitate
to show their nakedness.

We must attempt to settle now,
but cannot soon decide
on what they should be called, and how
they should be classified.

With varied principles at stake
we argue endlessly
around the bench, beside the lake,
beneath the chestnut tree.

Linum and Melampsora

- Introduction* The rust is racing with the flax.
 The flax, which started first,
 Is prone to fungal rust attacks—
 Blighted and accurs't.
- Observations* The flax is sicker than it feels:
 In sack-cloth and in dust,
 It uses multiple alleles
 To save itself from rust.
- The parasite may kill its host,
 Or stop it in its tracks.
 The last survivor is the most
 Impenetrable flax.
- Discussion* The vital theories of Flor
 Invoke a moral trend.
 The flax, which got there long before,
 May perish in the end;
 For every flax that lacks the knacks
 Of overcoming rust
 Or, in its struggles, stalls or slacks,
 Is destined for a bust.
- Summary* Herein the authors have discussed,
 With min., and mean, and max.,
 The mathematics of a rust
 That decimates the flax.
- Moral* The race goes rarely to the just—
 But, if you can, relax
 And contemplate the throes of rust
 In overthrowing flax.
- Bibliography* Rapport, D.J. & C.O. Pearson
 1980. Games that genes play.
 Evolutionary Theory 4,475.

The Grass of No-Man's Land

Let me lead you where the grass
Grows a little longer.
(You may notice, as you pass,
That its scent is stronger.)

Let me show you where the sod
Shines, a little damp,
In a strip where no man trod
By a roadside lamp.

Let me guide you to a zone—
Limited, but free—
That the dogs may call their own,
Marked by K₉P.

Waters flush the scents away
In our human bogs,
Whereas here the odors stay,
Fertilized by dogs.

Do you wonder, as you pass,
Where the scents are stronger?
Let me show you: where the grass
Grows a little longer.

* * *

Freely translated from:

Baldur Ragnarsson (Esploroj, 1959): *Nerimarkitaj Herboj*.

Quoted in ELNA NEWSLETTER 15(3)5, May-June, 1979.

Weeds

The humble Furbish Lousewort
Is very rarely seen.
Its flowers all are very small;
Its leaves are simply green.
It tends to grow in little clumps,
As harmless as a lamb,
Beside the grass where people pass
Along the Lincoln Dam.

Along the major highways,
Untrammelled and unplanned,
Another weed is setting seed
And covering the land.
The sprawling Furnished Housewort,
From sea to shining sea,
Is covering America
With massed humanity.

* * *

The Politics of Conservation

Alas for conservation! At the turning of the year,
Financial obligations are particularly clear.
The good of Mother Nature yields to good old Uncle Sam
And the lousy little lousewort to the Dickey Lincoln Dam.

The land of Ronny Reagan is the land of all-but-free
That dooms the little darter to the Little Tennessee.
Alas for conservation! When the budgeteers begin
And the natives face the Nation, then the Nation tends to win.

Roses

Roses are like noses:

They blush when freshly blown;
They tend to freeze
In a wintry breeze;
And it's best to pick one's own.

* * *

The Dendrochronomisogynist

With bristle cones and Torrey pines
He did the best he could.
He studied trees and, in their lines,
He saw beyond the wood.
He contemplated Nature's laws
And thought of higher things:
He had not time for love, because
He dated only rings.

Epilogue to The Daffodils by Wordsworth

In striving to identify
The spots upon our TLC's
We contemplate the plan whereby
The yellow flowers woo the bees,
And wonder, in bucolic bliss,
What metabolic spirit fills
The fatty acid synthesis
In chromoplasts of daffodils.

* * *

Hans Kleining *et al.*

Institut für Biologie II. Zellbiologie Universität Freiburg, Schlänzlestrasse 1
D-7800 Freiburg, Germany. Re. article in *Planta* 150, 166 (1980).

Steep Daisies

I saw a couple in a park
 In velvet robes: one short, one tall.
They stood, half-lighted, half in darkness
 By a wooded wall;
And someone said—I don't know who—
 "There came steep daisies to these parts".
A broken or misspoken cue?
 An interplay of hearts?
And one of those half-shaded folk
 Said "Cottering!"—a single word,
Half-whispered, almost as a joke—
 But nothing more occurred.
It was a silly dream, I know,
 And yet, it bothers me a bit.
Is "cottering" an act, a show,
 Or someone doing it?
The daily daisies that we know
 Cannot be classed as "steep" at all.
They bloom where lowly grasses grow,
 But rarely by a wall.
The message swirled about my mind:
 Steep daisies? By a grassy wood?
Steep daisies, of whatever kind,
 Are rarely understood.
And so, a half-remembered phrase
 Disturbed me, more than half awake,
For half a week of twilit days
 Beside a daisied lake.

The Flowers

Violets are frail and good,
Hiding shyly in the wood;
Rare to find and hard to get—
Don't be like a violet . . .
Don't be like a violet.

Lily blossoms, pure and white,
Fade and wither in a night;
Proud in chastity severe—
Don't be like a lily, dear . . .
Don't be like a lily, dear.

Rosebuds blush as soon as born;
Roses tremble on a thorn.
"Touch us not!" the roses bleat—
Don't be like a rose, my sweet . . .
Don't be like a rose, my sweet.

Dandelions gild the dawn
Lustily upon the lawn;
Many a merry, golden head
Comes unbidden to my bed . . .
Comes unbidden to my bed.

Bold and buxom, gold and gay,
Turns to down, and blows away.
That's the bloom for honest men—
Be my dandelion, then . . .
Be my dandelion, then.

The Cherry Tree

Before the window of my room,
Her barren boughs ablaze with white,
All laced with silver overnight,
 The cherry tree's in bloom.

No sign of leaf, no splash of green,
Relieves her black and white austere;
And 'neath the heavens, steely clear,
 No hopeful color's seen.

A bitter mockery is this
Of winter wind and frosty flowers
That, fruitless, melt in empty hours
 In sunshine's glancing kiss.

When spring awakes the blossom true,
 She'll bloom in warmer hue.

Sakura-no-shi

Cherry blossom in the spring
 Makes a merry rime;
Every tree a pretty thing
 For a little time.
When the snowy blooms are dead,
 Gentle winds that pass
Strip the shaking boughs, and shed
 Petals on the grass.

When the robins come to sing
 From a warmer clime,
I am stirred to burgeoning
 Little notes in rhyme.
But, as soon as summer wakes,
 Springtime fancies pass.
Tear my verses into flakes
 And strew them in the grass.

The Lily

(After the style of Wordsworth)

One morning in the early spring,
The grass still dewed with night,
I found a lily burgeoning,
Suffused in golden light.

And later, when a sunny day
Had warmed the verdant scene,
The lily blossomed, tall and gay,
Of all the flowers, queen.

When I returned across the lea
As day was almost done,
She glowed again in majesty
Beneath a setting sun.

And when dark night concealed the view
Behind her sable blind,
The lily, clad again in dew,
Unfolded in my mind.

Jequirity Beans *

Voo-deo-doo and Haiti-hi!

Watch out for a grim surprise!

Avoid red beans and jequirity seeds

From the dolls with the beady eyes.

Take sugar of lead for your tea instead,

Or arsenic on your greens,

But don't get sick on a swizzling stick

From a doll with jequirity beans.

Swizzle your gin with heroin

Or venom in other guise,

But don't swap queens with jequirity beans

Or the dolls with the scarlet eyes.

Deadly machines are jequirity beans;

A person who eats them dies.

So avoid all scenes with jequirity beans,

And Haitian dolls in skirts or jeans.

The wink of disaster is what it means

From a doll with jequirity eyes.

* *Newsweek* (Sept. 1962).

The Poison Ivy

(A song of Elizabethan New England)

The woods are fragrant in the spring
With scent of leaf and blossoming:
The trees are all with catkins hung,
And purple orchids bloom among
The poison ivy.

In summer, when the days are long,
The woods resound with thrushes' song.
Sweet honeysuckle from the hedge
Goes trailing to the river's edge
With poison ivy.

The grapes are ripened in the fall
Along the bushes by the wall.
The maples blush before they shed,
And all the hills are flaming red
With poison ivy.

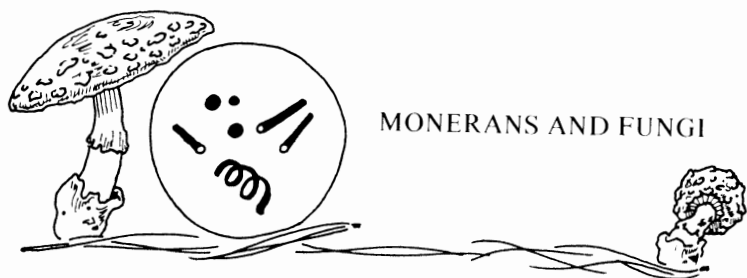
The woods succumb to winter's thrall,
And snowy blankets cover all.
We tread secure in heavy boots,
But 'neath the snow there lurk the roots
Of poison ivy.

*Blindness in Early Summer Cauliflower**

The leaves, who whisper songs unsung,
Do not enjoy a single note
Of wood-wind in the trees.
Jack-in-the-pulpit's purple tongue
Tastes not the nectar in his throat
That draws the hungry bees.

At morning, when the sunbeams rise,
The summer cauliflower, blind,
Can see no gems of dew.
Without his introspective eyes,
The convolutions of his mind
Cannot conceive. Can you?

* A communication under this title, by Dr. P. J. Salter, National Vegetable Research Station, Wellesbourne, Warwick, was published in *Nature* 180: 1056, 16 November 1957.



Keep It Clean!

Don't put germs on the moon, boys—
Don't go and sully her face.
There's too many firms
Of terrestrial germs,
So let's not contaminate space.
There's microbes all over the land, boys—
There's bugs in the oceans as well;
And if somebody soon
Goes and mucks up the moon,
We'll have nowhere that's sterile but Hell.

You Wait!

You treat us bugs
With rays and drugs
 In quest of morbid sports,
To grow awhile
In dungeons vial
 Or flasks of divers sorts.

You probe with blocks
In mutant stocks
 To solve your victual questions;
Then feed us breis
To neutralize
 Our inborn indigestions.

On milk, or meat,
Or some 'complete,'
 Our cultures thrive—in vain;
For o'er the brink
Of yawning sink
 You flush us down the drain.

The time, of course,
Will come, perforce,
 When *you* will meet *our* terms;
But until then,
Goodwill to Men.
 Sincerely yours,

—*The Germs.*

The Strain and the Bond

She was a melancoli clone,
A prey to moods and shyness,
Who stayed at home, and grew alone—
A virtuous f-minus.

She loved another from afar:
She idolized his gender.
She little knew of H-fr
(And less of Waring blender).

Responding to her coliform,
And tempted by her colihood,
The H-fr took her by storm
(As willful f-rs would).

Beguiled by airy persiflage
(A noxious kind of coltergeist),
She caught a bout of coliphage;
Succumbed to it; and lysed.

So, maidens, stay alone—and well—
Remaining blithe and bonny,
While other cultures go to Hell
In coli matrimony.

La Fermentation *

There's yeasts in sausage and yeasts in ham,
Yeasts in honey and strawberry jam,
But none of these media can compare
With the *conséquence de la vie sans air*.

There's yeasts in bottles and yeasts in flasks,
Yeasts in barrels and yeasts in casks.
We've beer in plenty and beer to spare
As a *conséquence de la vie sans air*.

There's yeasts imperfect and yeasts with spores
(Hats and needles in twos and fours),
Celibate yeasts, and yeasts that pair
As a *conséquence de la vie sans air*.

pp.

There's shadowy yeasts, both pink and white—
And I have a yeast that is black as night—
But color isn't as grave an affair
As the *conséquence de la vie sans air*.

adagio

I think in terms

(when I think at all)

That are saccharomy—

cetological:

But I've reached the stage when I don't much care

As a *conséquence de la vie*

la vie sans air!

* R. A. L. 1963. *Chemistry and Industry*, p. 461.

The Gay Amanita

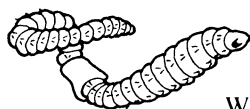
I once had a gay Amanita—
Exceedingly gay Amanita—
I found it one day on a fungal foray,
On a fungal, farungal foray.

I put it in my little basket—
My gay little, fey little basket—
It had volva and rings, but who cares for such things
On a fungal, farungal foray?

I cooked it with salt and with water—
A soupçon of salt in the water—
It was scarlet and white, and it tasted all right
As it came from a fungal foray.

The coroner said, "Misadventure—
Exceedingly sad misadventure—
You shouldn't eat food that you find in a wood
On a fungal, farungal foray.

"Be warned against gay Amanitas—
Especially gay Amanitas.
They put up the yields of Elysian fields
After fungal, farungal forays."



WORMS, MOLLUSCS, AND CRUSTACEANS



Wormsong

We are the worms, the under-footers,
Under the hooves of Pan,
Undermining the greens and putters,
Grooving the ways of man.

We are the casters, sub-soil pushers—
Wens on the Irish lawn—
Beating the birds (the two-in-bushers),
Ducking the cracks of dawn.

We are the slighted, slithy crawlers,
Prey to the toads of night;
'Ware of the fumbling fist-hook maulers,
Anglers right and might.

Under the hooves of Blitzen burners,
Under the scorching earth,
Odds or evens, the warmer turners
Yearn for the rains of birth.

Down in the fumid, humid humus,
Under the delve and toil,
There we await your term and tumus
Into the seeping soil.

We are the worms, the under-feeted,
Under the untrod sod;
Endless tales of the tail repeated,
Serving the ends of God.

Quissett Sands

Of all the green and pleasant lands,
There's none to rival Quissett sands.
Who could in fairness ask for more
Than such a gently shelving shore?

On rainy afternoons like these,
Beneath the sand I softly squeeze
To safe, sublittoral repose,
Secure from gulls and other foes,
And there relax, to chew my cud
Within the all-embracing mud.
How soft it is! How rich and black!
I slither up, and burrow back;
I shrug my mantle, or I squirm
Beside the slender, naked worm.
(Poor feeble thing! It must be Hell
To live without a shielding shell.)

With what exuberance and grace
Has Providence endowed our race!
How cunningly devised we are!

I settle, modestly ajar,
Extend my siphon up, and squirt
My message from the deepest dirt,
Condensing my sublime oration
To one exultant exclamation.

How exquisitely glad I am
To be a self-effacing clam!

Limax

(After Wordsworth)

She dwells among forgotten leaves
 'mid lost and mossy stones,
Where, dewy-eyed, the owlet grieves
 o'er disconnected bones.

Beside the lone, neglected heaps
 of half-digested grass
She shelters, where the willow weeps
 on all that come to pass.

The gentle lettuce seeks to grow
 to firm maturity,
But she is at the heart, and, oh,
 the difference to me!

Snail *

A cottage-loaf, but small and grey—
A dondulating, drifting barque—
Goes gravely on its slimy way
And leaves a glistening mark:

While, periscoping proud and high
With pin-point pupil, crystal lens,
On slender waving stem, each eye
Scans garden hills and glens.

Yet, touching wall or wither'd leaf,
Within itself the tip retracts. . .
He slides through life on pure belief,
Closing his eyes to facts.

* R. A. L. 1946. *Plan*, *London* 13:2.

Calvary

Who has set a humble snail
 Pronged upon a thorn,
Helpless as its forces fail,
 Feeble and forlorn?

When the glistenings of dew
 Desiccate and fade,
Pippa passes with her crew
 Into welcome shade.

While the silly, singing lark
 Gilds the ebbing dawn,
Here below, a vital spark
 Dies upon the thorn.

Swainsong

Come live with me, and be my love,
And so pursue our race
Towards a world of sober snails
And modesty of pace.

Beside you, in a flow'ry bed,
I love to take my ease,
And, with your foot appressed to mine,
I thrill in ecstasies.

We have no secrets, you and I:
We haven't any doors;
And all you have, I share, my dear,
And all I have is yours.

We nestle, double helices,
Each in a fitted house.
The self-same sentiments inflame
My ardor and my spouse.

Whate'er I do to you, my dear,
You do the same to me:
With Cupid's darts we play our parts
In matched lubricity.

Come, live with me, and be my love,
And so pursue our race
Towards a world of sober snails
And modesty of pace.

Relativity: Or Watch Out, You!

Yesterday I found a snail
Teetering upon the edge
Of my garden window-ledge.
So I took him by the hand
(Mine—not his) securely, and
Popped him in the garbage pail.

God, who watches without fail
Everything we choose to do,
Doubtless knows a trick or two.
Finger poised expectantly,
He may do the same to me
When I venture on a rail.

Out upon a distant limb—
In some wholly other place
In the distant realms of space:
In some stellar atmosphere
Far beyond the now and here—
THEY may have it in for Him!

Song of the Winkles *

I've seen the merry Irish on Saint Patrick's Day parades,
And throngs of sorry sophomores a-waiting for their grades;
I've seen a herd of buffalo a-chewing of the cud—
But I've never seen the wily winkles schooling in the mud. . .

Winkles, winkles, wily winkles, schooling in the mud.

I've seen the fans a-surfing and converging on the gate,
And gangs of geese a-gathering, preparing to migrate;
I've seen the Holy Rollers rolling wholly on the floor—
But I've never seen the winkles in the wrinkles of the shore. . .

Winkles, winkles, wily winkles, schooling on the shore.

I've seen a lot of lemmings milling madly to their graves,
And porpoises a-spouting on an outing in the waves;
I've seen a troop of hooligans a-fooling in a band—
But I've never seen a single wrinkle schooling on the sand. . .

Winkles, winkles, not a wrinkle schooling in the sand.

The ways of little animals are like the ways of men:
They go off in one direction, then come trooping back again.
The summer's nearly over, boys, so what're we waiting for?
Let us join the wily winkles and go schooling on the shore. . .

Winkles, winkles, wily winkles, schooling on the shore.

* Jenner, C. E. 1956. *Biol. Bull.* 111:291.

The Hermit

'Neath the haunts of cray and cuttle,
Down between the rocks I scuttle,
 Deep among the dimming shades
 Where the rippled sunlight fades.

I am not the one to sidle
Up the sandy intertidal
 Into reaches of the net
 And the fatal vinaigrette.

I am cautious and devout,
Hardly ever stepping out
 From my home, where once a snail
 Used to tuck *his* tender tail.

I prefer to meditate
In the solitary state,
 Peering forth, with eyes intent
 On the murky firmament,

Piously on the alert
For nutritious scraps of dirt
 Which I nibble, as I pray
 For the cuttle and the cray.

Opabinia *

I went to the shore after dinia
 To run—and to practise a speech—
And found there a lone Opabinia
 That had stranded itself on the beach.
It was like a long sowbug—but thinia—
 With a kind of a trunk on its head,
And some children expressed the opinia
 That it hadn't been very long dead.
You could see it was just a beginia,
 Without any idea of the game:
Its rate of decline had been linia;
 Its race to oblivion the same.

And so, with a superior grinia,
 I covered it over with sand,
And buried the last Opabinia
 That ever was seen in the land.

* Whittington, H. B. 1975. *Phil. Trans. R. Soc. Lond. (B)* 271:1-43.

Sapphirina

This sapphire, hidden in the head
Of vitreous planktonic toad
Is no true jewel but, instead,
An iridescent copepode.

Beneath her rainbowed carapace
Concealing mandible and palp,
She occupies a subtle space
Within the pharynx of a salp.

She nestles in commensal room,
Ensconced in an ascidian
Like unborn Caesar in the womb—
An opal in a crystal can.

No purpler robe was ever worn
By toga'd Augustina
Or any Roman, nobly born,
Than this of Sapphirina.



Hanging Gardens

In Beds. and Salop., Herts. and Hants.,
Our garden plots abound with ants,
 Though in the sod where Adam delves
 They don't make gardens for themselves.

But, on this antithetic topic,
In humid forests neo-tropic
 Live other garden-loving ants
 (Benign insects or miscreants)
That build, with rooted herb and carton,
A kind of formic kindergarten
 Secure from antisocial tykes
 (Ant-eaters, pangolins, and shrikes)
And thus exhibit care towards
Their pupae and their honey-hoards
 In hanging gardens modeled on
 The prototypes in Babylon.

* * *

Requiescant in Pace

Beneath the sod repose the bones
Of insect artist Willy Jones
 Who painted—e'er his sad demise—
 A thousand pretty butterflies.
Their mortal bodies, sad to say,
Succumbed to mites, and passed away:
 Only iconotypes remain,
 Prepared, with artistry and pain
 (In Chelsea) by that Willy Jones.
God rest you, Will—and your icones!

The Locusts and the Ants

(after La Fontaine)

“You silly ants!” the locusts cried
And stridulated in their pride.
“What sterile little lives you lead
Collecting crumbs and storing seed
To serve your bloated, fertile queen—
An animated egg-machine.
You scutter endlessly around
The dusty gutters of the ground,
And fritter little lives away
In saving for a rainy day,
While locusts sing, and leap, and fly
Between the pastures and the sky.”

There came a week of teeming rain
That inundated wood and plain.
It sickered through the soggy ground
And nearly all the ants were drowned,
While locusts, clinging to the grass,
Just waited for the clouds to pass.
And when the sun returned serene,
And grass grew lush and brighter green
How merrily the locusts fed,
And flew, and leaped, and grew, and bred,
Until their time had come to die
And leave the pastures for the sky.

I Am Kind to Animals *

A moth,
White fingers,
Softly scratching at my window-pane,
Beating its head
With muffled, snowball thud
Again and again on the unseen glass.

Poor thing, I think,
It will get a headache,
Or dent the beaten copper of its eyes.

So, laying down my pen,
I open the window.

In a roaring flutter
The moth enters,
And in little loops
Threshes up the whitened walls,
Constantly colliding with its shadow
On the false-sky ceiling.

Now, turning towards the light,
It slams and slams again into the hot bulb,
Fluttering down, stalling, with burned antennae,
Only to rise and stagger madly
Round the lamp again.

There can be only one end
To that suicidal career,
Unless I put a stop to it.

Setting down my pen again,
I give chase,
Cupping my hands,
Like old, two-spoon tea-strainers.

* R. A. L. 1960. *Atlantic Advocate* (December): 104.

The ink spills on the table
And the lamp rocks perilously,
But I have the moth,
Safe, trembling within my grasp.

Carefully I put it outside
Upon the windowsill,
And, quickly, close the window
On my finger.

And, as I watch,
The white form,
Vibrating into grey,
Takes off from the edge,
And rises, dwindling,
Like a solitary snowflake
Lit in my window-beam,
Till it disappears,
Suddenly,
Into the maw
Of a silent, swooping, black bat.

I am kind to animals.
I have done my best,
And am glad.

That bat must have been
Hungry.

Butterflies

Three butterflies flitted across the vale
And into a field nearby.
One was a female and one was a male,
And one was ... a butterfly.
But whether you wonder what they would do,
And whether you wonder why,
Has nothing to do with the likes of you—
Unless you're a butterfly.

Three long-haired teenagers, filled with joy,
Were wrestling in the hay:
One was a girl, and one was a boy,
And one was ... I couldn't say.
And maybe you think they played too long,
Or ought to have played in pairs,
But whether you think they're right or wrong
Is of no-one's concern but theirs.

* * *

Femmes Fatales

Listen, male *Drosophilas*—wee “lovers of the dew”—
Stay away from female flies: consider what they do.
Mating with a virgin brings an earlier demise.
Mating with a lot of them is even worse, for flies.
If you crave longevity, and yearn for living long,
Waste no energy in courtship, quarrelling or song.
Mating isn't good for you, the scientist imputes.
Stay away from female flies, and stick to simple fruits.

Elixir of Love and Longevity *

Try, Madam, this wonderful jelly,
Produced by the industrious bee,
And a beauty serene
Will embellish your mien
With a glamour that's wondrous to see.

Test, Lady, this magical lotion,
Distilled in the gloom of the comb.
Augment your agility!
Boost your fertility!
Keep things a-humming at home!

The use of Royal Jelly cosmetic
That's cast in tenebrious hive
Will preserve you, a queen
Of sustained seventeen,
And it *may* keep you longer alive.

Your countenance salve with this unction,
Prepared for the apian throne;
And long after your spouse
Has departed your house
You might still produce offspring, alone.

* Ad in *The New Yorker*.

My Heart's in the Highlands

(pumping blood for you-know-whom.)

Along the grooves
 Where peat is cut;
In track of hooves
 And waggon rut;
Beside the fords,
 Beneath the bridges
Hang misty hordes
 Of merry midges.

By birchwood dank
 And lochan edge,
Or boggy bank
 Of reed and sedge;
Beside the gate
 Beyond the mud
They hang in wait
 To sip my blood.

Skater's Waltz *

(Dedicated to our best-known oceanic insect.)

Hail the holy *Halobates*!
How miraculous he skates
Over billow, over foam,
While other bugs lie snug at home.

He must seek his distant dates
Where the Date-line undulates
Far across the Western seas,
North and South at no degrees.

In all kinds of surface states,
Haply, Mr *Halobates*
Ultimately copulates
With his long-sought billow-mates.

Harried Mrs *Halobates*
Lays her eggs on orange-crates,
Flotsam, feathers, bits of boats—
Almost anything that floats.

By the oath of Hippocrates—
Who would be a *Halobates*?

* Cheng, L. 1972. *Oceans* 5:54-55.

The Thoughtful Naturalist

I chanced to see her, sitting there
 Upon a withered stick,
Waving her forelegs through the air—
 A solitary tick.

How was she made aware of me—
 By warmth, or smell, or sound?
Was she, perhaps, aroused to see
 My shadow on the ground?

It must be grim to sit and pray,
 Hungry, and thin, and dry,
On vital vigil, day by day,
 To catch a passer-by.

(I found her later on my knee,
 Devoutly hanging on.
I picked her off immediately
 And flushed her down the john.)

Arachne

The spider left her muddy hole
Among the forests of the coal
To suck the prey that crept across
Her limy lines among the moss.

She spun her webs, concealed from view,
In shrewd geometries of dew.

A hundred million years went by
Before the first unwitting fly,
Unheeding, took the air and met
Disaster in the subtle net,
And perished in the lacy maze.

It took you but a hundred days.

Group Selection

The bee that stings a man thereby
Condemns herself to pine and die.

What benefit can be implied

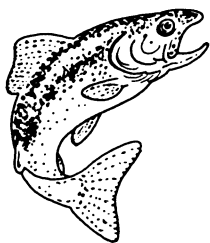
By such an act of apicide?

It helps, in fact, to keep alive

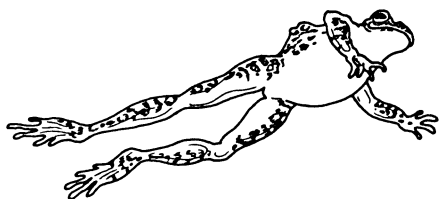
Her little sisters of the hive

Whom we might swat—as is our wont—

But, having learned our lesson, don't.



COLD BLOODED VERTEBRATES



Amor vincit omnia. *

There once was a toadfish called *Opsanus tau*
Who lived in a bottle—though goodness knows how.
He called to each female “O, mate of my soul,
Come join me and live in this botulous hole.”

The ladies swam up, and they backed off again
Thinking “Fish will be fishes, and men will be men.
There’s something suspicious, it’s plain to us now:
We can’t live together with *Opsanus tau*.”

Though *Opsanus* sang, with a grunt and a groan,
The ladylike fishes all left him alone.
He sang like a pig and he looked like a cow,
So nary a lady loved *Opsanus tau*.

But oceans are vast, and their currents run deep.
There’s more to a life than just feeding and sleep;
And now on the bottom, where pressures allow,
There are oodles and schoodles of *Opsanus tau*.

* Winn, H. E., and Olla, B. L. 1972. *Behavior in Marine Animals*, pp. 361-385.

Fishes' Eyes

The skate, that seeks food on the bottom,
Has eyes on the flat of his face.
The eye on the bottom moves upwards
In halibut, turbot, and plaice.
Some fish look in either direction—
Like mackerel, herring, or cod—
But blennies look only at gobies,
And gobies look only to God.

Lantern Fish

I met a little lantern fish—
Silk-scaled and goggle-eyed—
And asked him "What is it you seek
Beneath the ebbing tide?"
"I'm looking for an honest fish"
The honest fish replied.

A Beg for Toads

See a dried and flattened toad
Crucified upon the road;
From the comfort of his pond,
Sent into the great beyond—
Pressed into unyielding sod—
By an omniprescient God.
Heel or wheel in hurry grim
Permanently cancelled him
In a smudge beside the fence
Of divine expedience.

If another toad emerges
From his green and pleasant verges,
Seeing no alternative—
Let him cross the road, and live!

Nessie

Down in the murky depths of Ness
The Monster and the Monsteress,
 With half a dozen monsterets
 (How many, Mrs. M. forgets)
Eke out their self-effacing lives
With fourteen cousins and their wives.

Despite their ancient pedigree,
That growing little family
 Is generally quite content
 To pay a minimum of rent
And live obscurely in the lake
On anything that they can take
 (Like dying salmon, upset boats,
 Odd tourists, and unlucky goats
That fall from cliff or crag austere
Into the loch—and disappear.)

The Monsters are a humble lot,
But they're content with what they've got—
 Though finally (they say) they plan
 To migrate back to Pakistan.

Saurians

The alligators of the South
Have down-turned corners of the mouth,
 Perhaps because of allegations
 By rude reptilian relations
Who cast aspersions on their tails
And on their subtly sliding scales.

 The common Northern crocodile
 Is more inclined to wear a smile.
The tears he sheds so readily
Are signs of simple joie-de-vie.

 Summer, winter—sooner, later—
 Warmer, cooler—alligator—
Eggs in dozens—eggs in piles—
Male and female—crocodiles.



BIRDS

Bobolinks *

Earth has no mysteries like those of birds—
Distant migrations, and songs without words.
Why, when the daylight is longer in May,
Do birds like the bobolinks hasten away?
What could they want that is better to eat
Than grains of wild rice and Canadian wheat?
Given an urge to go, sooner or later,
Down to the forests beyond the Equator,
Why don't they stay there, make love, and raise young
Down in Brazil, in the jungles unsung?

The question is mooted by John and by Will:
"Why don't the bobolinks breed in Brazil?"
The bobolinks answer (as we could have guessed):
"It's too hot and muggy to sit on a nest."

* Hamner, W. M., and Stocking, J. 1970. *Ecology* 51:743-751.

The Birds of Beford Manor

The peacock and the guinea-hen
May serve as paradigms for men:
Each in his manner serves a lord
In his estate or at his board.

The peacock struts 'mid dappled fawns
About his lordship's velvet lawns,
Symbolic of the noble male
With proudly iridescent tail;
Whereas the guinea-hen is barred
And penned beside the kitchen yard.
A humble, dumpy, sombre sack,
With simple spots of white on black,
She wears her feathers like a shawl
And hardly has a tail at all.

The peacock graces court and stable:
The guinea-fowl, the dinner table:
For when, at last, she comes of age,
The guinea-hen, with rice and sage,
Is sacrificed without remorse
To constitute a poultry course.

The peacock, shrilly crying "Pao!"
Is fond of telling people how
His kinfolk cunningly contrive
To stay at large, and stay alive,
While other birds are slain or shot
And end up in a cooking pot.

In this, like any other game,
The principles are much the same:
If you would thrive while others suffer,
You have to be a little tougher.

. . .

To serve the lord is not enough:
You've got to be extremely tough.

Conversation Under an Oriole's Nest in Vermont

With all the fresh and pleasant woods
 To weave his twigged abode,
He chose to raise his summer broods
 Above a rustic road.

I asked him why he chanced to build
 In boughs of dusty green
That dipped in atmospheres so filled
 With fumes of gasoline.

He said, "I like domestic trees
 Beside the traffic's roar.
They throng with childhood memories
 Of distant Baltimore."

I thanked him for his view of life;
 Admired his hanging nest;
And hurried home to join my wife
 At Forty-third and West.

A Lesson in Ornithology

I thought I heard a nightingale
Creating dulcet melody
In trilling, pentatonic scale
Upon a variable key.

But then, as memories were stirred,
I checked to verify the score—
It is a European bird,
And foreign to this western shore.
Apparently I had been wrong;
It must have been a thrush's song.

I heard at dusk a cuckoo call:
Cuckoo, cuckoo, he seemed to sing,
His tenor, sweetly musical,
Re-echoing, re-echoing.
But have we cuckoos of the kind
That harrow European hearts?
If not, it came into my mind,
We may have local counterparts.
And, on returning home that night,
I learned, alas, that I was right.

The Ptrials of the Ptarmigan

In wintertime, the ptarmigan—
As everybody knows—
Is blameless as a butterfly
And whiter than the snows.

He nibbles on the foliage
Of willow and of rose,
Assimilating nourishment
From anything that grows.

But in the silly summertime
He reels from bar to bar;
His plumage darkly mottled
And his soul as black as ptar.

The ptourist is another bird
Of corresponding feather.
He flocks in Spring like anything
And congregates together.

And when the summer time arrives
He grabs a handy gun
And goes to kill the ptarmigan
For supper or for fun.

But ultimately, chilling winds
Confine him to the house:
The ptourist in the winter time
Remains at home to grouse.

And then the subtle ptarmigan,
At ten degrees below,
Assumes his pristine charmigan,
And, safe from mortal harmigan—
Secure from hunt's alarmigan—
He flits from farm to farmigan,
As white as driven snow.

The Oiled Swan

Whereas, for several decades, many thousands of birds yearly have been victims to oil-polluted seawater, the oiled swan is a more recent problem. —*Nature* 180:1453.

Why did he sing, poor bird, poor thing,
Where the stream ran cold and narrow?
Maimed to die of a broken wing
Pierced by a kingsman's arrow.

Fallen as snow, when a cruel bow,
Bent by a yeoman's hand,
Sang in the willows and brought him low
At the whim of a king's command.

Why did he sing, poor soul, poor thing,
Where the stream ran cold and fast?
On a silver platter he served his king
As a course in a royal repast.

* * *

Why does he sing, poor bird, poor thing,
Where the rainbowed waters roil?
Doomed to die, he can never fly,
For his down has been grimed with oil.

Sadly I go to the shades below,
To the lakes of eternal night.
There is no pure worth on the streams of earth
Where a swan is no longer white.

Sea-Pie

O foolish oyster-catcher, why
Inflict on me your frightful cry?
You surely cannot think I dote
On that persistent, piercing note?
How would you like it, if a pair
Of us, as would be only fair,
Should daily follow you around
With equally depressing sound?

* * *

But we could pipe until we burst;
We'd certainly get tired first.

The Stormy Petrels

Lone birds, that roam the boundless space
Upon the open seas
Have no accustomed resting place
Among familiar trees.

Each flits and fishes by himself
Where unseen currents flow
Beyond the continental shelf
A thousand feet below.

Their ways converge, and cross, and part
In paths of no address.
None but the pining human heart
Can know such loneliness.

The Tern

The Common Tern's a common bird
In every meaning of the word.

Though other fowls have deemed it best
To raise their young within a nest,
The terns all scorn this system sound
And lay their eggs upon the ground;
Then get upset when we approach,
Intent (the terns suppose) to poach
On their domestic patch of stones,
And voice, in no uncertain tones,
Their angry protest to the skies
With raucous and discordant cries.

In this indignant frame of mind
They swoop upon us from behind,
And manifest parental care
By snatching beakfuls of our hair.

Now, though we surely wouldn't grudge
A tuft or two, to save the drudge
Of seeking nesting-stuffs around
The shores, where little's to be found,
It would be quite (to say the least)
Against the nature of the beast
To build a nest of any kind.
They shouldn't put what hair they find
Upon our heads to utter waste—
It shows a wanton lack of taste.

In twos and threes they swoop and dive,
While we, in terror grim, contrive
To ward them off, with curse and shout,
By waving maps and things about.

The terns, from scalp-despoiling barred,
Now quickly play their second card,
And, from no great a height, resort
To actions of another sort
(Which, decently, I shall not name),
Exhibiting unerring aim.

And, as we, fleeing, stumble o'er
The weeds and boulders of the shore,
We hear their hoarse, triumphant cries
As, distantly, the shouting dies.

* * *

The tern may seem a handsome bird;
But we have solemnly averred
That, till these acts have been atoned,
We'll leave no wretched tern unstoned.

Lament for a Dead Sea-Bird *

I grieve for grebes that wash ashore
To tread the dappled waves no more.

. . .

This little bird, that lately died,
Was wont to pedal through the tide,
His dumpy body, trim and pert,
To overbearing surf alert,
That braved, with no apparent care,
All onslaughts of both sea and air
When foam would fly and billows boil,
Succumbed to feather-clogging oil.
Each petal-fingered, leather hand
Is folded by a last command.
His life's account is settled now.
His elfin bill and shallow brow
In dead disorder double back
On soggy plumes of grey and black.
He treads the dappled waves no more.

. . .

I grieve for grebes that wash ashore.

* R. A. L. 1963. *Amer. Scientist* 51:262a.

Love

I take my hat off to the doves,
Who share my natural desires,
But somehow manage to make love
While balanced on electric wires.

The fields of Venus may be tough
And just as hard as fields of Mars.
Some people find it hard enough
To do it in the backs of cars.

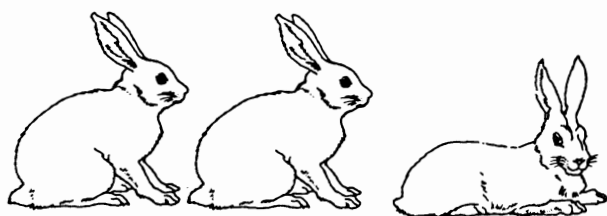
* * *

The Honey-eater

The Lewin honey-eater
(eponymous with me)
Is infinitely neater
When sitting down to tea.

His yellow-breasted sibling
(as common names attest)
Is more inclined to dribbling
the honey down his chest
and fails to screw the cover
securely on the jar.

The Lewin, you'll discover
Is tidier by far.



MAMMALS

*Lesser Breeds? **

The Chinese hamster copulates
At fifty times our human rates.

 This is, to him, a source of pride;
 It keeps his hamstress satisfied;
And soon (if books can be believed)
Ten little hamlets are conceived.

 (I doubt if rates approaching these
 Are equalled by the Red Chinese.)

But ten new babies in a house
Are overmuch for man or mouse.

 Compared with him, I'd be content—
 In both respects—with 10%.

^{*} *Mensa Bull.* 111:608.

*The Coolidge Effect**

You—be you macho man or mouse—
Should covet not your neighbor's house
Nor yet his yacht, nor yet his store,
Nor yet the lady (mouse)(next door).
The whitest house (or mouse) is not
For any Jack who wants the lot.
You should endeavor to resist
Temptations like a Calvinist.

* See: Dewsbury, D.A. *Psychology Bul.* **89**, 464 (1981); Hayashi, S. and Kimura, T. *Animal Behaviour* **31**, 81 (1983). Cited in *Nature* **304**, 484 (1983).

The Rat Race

More than ten years ago, discussing the possibility that mankind might become extinct, Professor Haldane said: "If this happens, I venture to hope that we shall not have destroyed the rat, an animal of considerable enterprise which stands as good a chance as any other of evolving toward intelligence." —*New York Times*, 25 July 1957.

If Man should perish from the Earth,
His heritage perhaps may pass
To creatures of a lesser worth,
The enterprising rodent class.

Out from the rubble, dust, and flies,
Out from the cellars and the holes,
They will emerge, to blink their eyes,
And gender intellects and souls,

The steady skill of paws and tools,
The will to wish, the love to learn,
With martyrs, kings, and other fools
To split the atom in their turn;

Till, wracked in fear, in pride unbowed,
With cankered bones and mutant genes,
Seared in a spawning mushroom cloud
They blow themselves to smithereens.

Then, from the deeper, darker clay,
The silly worms shall turn and thrive,
Their heads no more than tails, for they
Have but the senses to survive.

Gracia primae vesperi Februariæ

(—*Grace for the night of February 1st*)

Awake! The night is young; the moon is full.

The hunting goddess hastens to the chase,
While, in the fields, the Marathonian bull

Dreams of his deeds to propagate his race,
His heavy breathing descant to the breeze—

The gentle wind that in the pasture sighs—
And, like the cowherd, drowsing 'neath the trees,
He dreams, perchance, of more and better cows.

Awake! And in our midnight revels join

To pass the night and speed the dawn along
With flowing mead and grilling tenderloin,
With melody and wild, bucolic song.

I drink to thee, fair goddess of the moon,

For that my cup of happiness is full;
To Fate, that brings satiety so soon,
And Taurus—noble, Zodiacal bull.

How!

or

America the Problematical

When hungry Indians chose to dine,
Before the White Men came,
They caught and ate the porcupine
(Though by another name.)

But while they smoke the Pipes of Peace
In dwindled numbers now,
Prolific porcupines increase—
(I sometimes wonder, "How?")

Kine

The cow that trudges through the mud
Or sits around and chews the cud
 Has horns and ears, and seven stomachs,
 But otherwise is quite a lummoX.
She gives us milk—I'm not sure how.
(That's all I know about a cow.)

I know two things about a horse,
And one of them is rather coarse.*

I know three things about a nurse,
And two of them are even worse.

* This couplet is by Ogden Nash.
I thought I'd also have a bash.
The rest of this low elegy
Was written by yours truly—me.)

*The Fossil Pigs of Florisbad**

The fossil pigs of Florisbad
 Were obdurate and mean;
They foraged through the forests
 Of the Upper Pleistocene.
But when I contemplate the world,
 It makes me rather sad
To think about those simple swine
 In far-off Florisbad.

* Paragraph heading in *Nature* 180:1393.

Expression

The little calf
Can never laugh,
Or look perplexed
Or frown.

To show surprise
He blinks his eyes
And gambols up
And down.

At Nature's need
He seeks his feed
Direct from mother's
Udder;

And then reveals
The joy he feels
With oscillating
Rudder.

The Stag at Bay

Scotland, with her scenic charms,
Dominates the "Argyll Arms";
 Paintings crowd the humid halls
 With a thousand waterfalls,
Where the herds of deer or cows
Sniff the breeze, or stand and browse,
And, in mist and murky weather,
Crossing streams or trampling heather,
"Monarchs of the Glen" abound—
Cervine splendor all around.
"Noble stags engaged in battle,"
"Dogs, and deer," and "Highland cattle";
"Lowing herds at fall of night";
"Stag and hounds," and "Deer in flight"
Leaping free from crag to crag;
Yet another "Dying Stag."
"Cattle by the river brink"
Watch me from above the sink.
On the mantel by the fire,
"Soft-eyed doe and stately sire."
Countless scenes of deer and fawns;
Trunkless heads, and headless horns.

Painted, glassy bovine glares
Greet me as I mount the stairs.
"Cattle by the river brink"
Watch me from above the sink.
Wounded, dying deer, and dead,
Throng the walls above my head.

Ruminants oppress my sleep,
Till, distractedly, I creep
Out towards some corner that'll
Not be full of Highland cattle.

* * *

Balefully, the "Stag at Bay"
Stares at me, *au cabinet*.

Elks, Whelks, and Their Ilk

The monarchs of the Irish bogs
Succumbed to neither men nor dogs
But (most ecologists agree)
To calcium deficiency.

They scoured the base-deficient peat
For antlers and old shells to eat
Around the Celtic countryside
And, finding all too few, they died.

Then mourn the passing of the elks
But note the wisdom of the whelks
That roam the shore—their native heath—
With silver-indurated teeth,

And bore to death their mollusc friends,
Who come to sad, unsuccored ends.
Without the need for extra lime,
The whelks survive to modern time.

Thus ungulate and gastropod,
And all that live by sea or sod,
Are doomed to be, or not to be,
By biogeochemistry.

The Decline of the Unicorn

Behold the haughty unicorn,
His snowy eyebrows raised in scorn.
The single horn upon his brow
Distinguishes him from a cow.
His coat is white, his mane is long,
His scent is unicornly strong—
So strong, in fact, that one can tell
A unicorn by just the smell.

Why is it, do you think, that no-
One mentioned this when, long ago,
The unicorns, so bold and grand,
Abounded all across the land?
Perhaps it is because, like men,
They grew tendentious now and then,
Inclined, when friends could not agree,
To flaunt their unicornity
And, as a consequence, were not
Among the pets that people got
As birthday presents, or for fun;
While every lord possessing one
Was glad to leave it, safe from harm,
In some far corner of his farm.

But if a virgin chanced to get
A unicornling as a pet—
(She didn't mind the smell, for she
Was girt with pure virginity)—
She generally chose to lead
It out to pasture in a mead,
With halter of a golden tress
To keep it docile (more or less)—
The normal method to adorn
And lead around a unicorn.

The male, though noble in his way,
Consumes a lot of oats and hay,
Or seeks the greenest swards of grass
And browses like a common ass;
But though an idol of the arts,
He's little good at drawing carts.
The female, which is not as tall,
Gives hardly any milk at all.

The unicorn is dying out:
There now are very few about:
Survivors of a noble race,
Across the land, their price of place
Is taken by the common cow.

* * *

And virgins, too, are rarer now.

Ode to a Doe

With eye of sloe, the dappled fawn
Grows up in grace to face the dawn—
 To greet the sun's refulgent ray
 In bracken at the breaking day.
O'er moor and mountain, beck and dell,
By lochan edge and littered fell,
 With little fear of fire or foe,
 The fawn becomes a fallow doe.

And now, beside dark-watered meres,
Alone, alert, with twitching ears,
 She hurries by the hills so fast
 To seek the scents of mornings past.
From rosy dawn to dappled dusk,
She tracks the subtle smell of musk
 That marks a rutting stag. Now see
 How circumspectly she and he
Obey Dame Nature's high decree
To generate posterity—
 To make another dappled fawn,
 Another year, another dawn ...

Sonnet—on the Greening of the Bears

No other zoo can boast so odd a scene.

Our visitors take second looks, and stare.

They may have seen, perhaps, a bigger bear,
But never bears so evidently green.

(Of late, our polar bears are going green!)

No longer hungry, shaggy, lean and mean:

Curated now with tender, loving care

In sunny pool beside their concrete lair,
They seem well fed, contented, sleek and clean.
(And yet, our polar bears are going green!)

The snows of yester-year, that might have been

A source of algae in their hollow hair,

Have melted long ago, though leaving there
The causes of this viridescent sheen
(Their hearts are polar, though their coats be green.)

Envoi

Our guardian angels seem to have a flair

For photogenics, or the tiny screen.

Our public image burgeons everywhere

Because our polar bears are going green.

Ottery

A fitter fits;
A cutter cuts;
And an aircraft spotter spots;
A baby-sitter
Baby-sits—
But an otter never ots.

Though sinners sin
And thinners thin
And paper-blotters blot;
I've never yet
Had letters let
Or seen an otter ot.

A batter bats
(Or scatters scats);
A potting shed's for potting:
But no one's found
A bounder bound
Or caught an otter otting.

The Golf Lynx

The golf lynx is a savage cat
That putters tend to tremble at.
The ears are tufted in the male,
Who sports a terminable tail.
The female is reserved and shier,
And stays at home beside the fire,
For she is neither lithe nor keen
At catching caddies on the green.
She much prefers to sit and wait
While her insatiable mate
Goes stalking grimly to and fro
To catch an unsuspecting pro
(Especially the surly kind)
On whom he pounces from behind;
Then, with a rarefying roar,
He drags the fellow to the fore,
And lugs him to his lynxic lair
(A handy sandy bunker) where
He rapidly dismembers him
By rending limb from knickered limb.
Then, when he's nibbled off enough,
He drags the roughage through the rough
And, after dark, he slyly slinks
To join his loving lady lynx
To share his tasty bits of pros
In calm, collynxial repose.

* * *

To lynxes, players serve as staples.
The Sport of Kings? The Golf of Naples!

The Purple Poodle

A woman, somewhat past her prime,
Who walks around these parts,
Conceals the ravages of time
By science and the arts.

A snowy poodle takes her out
For exercise and air.
The dog is slim; his owner, stout,
With purple-tinted hair.

One day I plan to summon up
The nerve to ask her why
She does not tint her poodle pup
With matching purple dye.

But she will answer, I suppose;
“Why, sir, that would look odd.
A purple poodle would oppose
Good taste in man and God.”

The Old Dog

Pity the aging coach-hound, who derives
From far Dalmatia and from sporting lives.
Distraught with mange, and crippled with the gout;
Too old to hunt, or even venture out
To course the coach; too old to change his spots,
He lies, afflicted by those canine rots
That strike senility in wolf and fox,
The victim of some penetrating pox—
A foul infirmity—that ends his days.
(He caught it off a hydrant—so he says!)

Dolphins and Borborygms *

What are they saying to one another,
 'Way down there in the sea?
Down where the likes of us would smother,
What are they saying to one another
 Deep in obscurity?
Up at the level of ships and billows,
 All that we hear is the sad intoning
 Sounds of the dolphins telephoning,
Talking to one another.

What are we saying to one another
 Under the sheltering sheet?
Down where the breaths of life would smother,
What are we saying to one another
 Halfway towards our feet?
Up at the level of lips and pillows,
 All that we hear is the burping, beeping
 Sounds of intestinals unsleeping,
Talking to one another.

Cradle my head by your equator
 Close to your navel parallel.
Darker and warmer, sooner, later,
Cradle my head by your equator
 Where I can listen well,
Tuned to abdominal tones the clearest.
What has your tummy to tell me, dearest,
 That even your heart can't tell?

* Kellogg, W. N. 1962. *Natural History* 71(2):30-39.

Shanty

On Greenland's Shores

The captain leads a decent life—

 An honest man is he.

He leaves his children and wife

 In Bedford-by-the-Lea,

And goes with forty sealmen a-sailing off to sea.

 So swing your pretty paddles, boys,

 From little seal to seal.

 The mothers never notice, boys;

 The babies never feel—

And we'll all be gone from Greenland in the morning.

And all the jolly sealmen

 Who make his merry crew

Are honorable citizens,

 And decent fellows, too.

Those forty honest Cornishmen are good as me or you.

 And what's a little blood, me boys?

 So what's a battered brain?

 It's o'er the ocean flood, me boys:

 We'll nay be back again

When we've left all-bloody Greenland in the morning

They batter out the babies' brains

 With lethal hammer blows.

They leave whatever else remains

 To stain the bloody snows

And eighty thousand carcasses are left to feed the crows.

There's bags of pretty fur, me boys:
There's yards of furry trim:
There's sealy coats for her, me boys,
And sealy hats for him
When we flog the fleece of Greenland in the morning.

They make a living from the seal
Of Greenland's chilly floes.
The blizzards and the nights conceal—
The bodies decompose—
Till eighty thousand skeletons lie frozen in the snows.

So pack your pretty paddles, boys,
And pack your stinking sacks.
There's dollars from the dead, me boys
(The Devil take the tax!)
We'll be back on Greenland's shores another morning.

Chez nous

Back in the days of shortages of flats
 We took an attic, for a modest fee,
In company with six or seven bats
 Who'd got there first. We lived *chez chauve-souris*.

Then came the mice, and peace of mind was gone,
 With squeals of fear, and squeaks and flying fur.
My wife fled hither, and the mice fled yon,
 Distraught with terror and with *sauve qui peut*.

Our present home is new. It serves to house
 (Apart from spiders) just my wife and me;
And so, as long as circumstance allows,
 We choose to call it simply "*Sans Souris*."

Bats-eye View

I can hear the narrow echoes
 From the wires along the street.
I can hear the brittle beetle
 And the muffled moth-wings beat.
I have but to click and listen
 To the echoes that I make
And I hear the waters glisten
 On the surface of the lake.
From the branches and the belfry
 To the solid earth below,
These are objects without question;
 They are things of which we know.
Though you talk of clouds and moonshine
 And of subtle starry beams,
There is only light and darkness;
 All the rest is human dreams.

*A Whale**

Could someone catch a whale, do you suppose,
With just a rod and line; and would you wish
To hook him through the tongue, or through the nose,
Or through the jaw, as if he were a fish?

Would he implore you, then, to let him go,
And bargain, with ingratiating tone,
With promises to be your slave, to show
Eternal deference to you alone?

And could you ever tame him, like a bird,
To be a pet for children in the street?
(The whole idea is utterly absurd—
Just think of all the shrimps he'd need to eat!)

* Job 41.

The Watchers

Here are the grey whale watchers,
 Watching for breach and spout;
Where the waves are low and the winds are slack,
Catching a glimpse of a shining back
 Or a tail fluke flashing out.

There are the gulls that, daily, keep
 Watch on the wind-swept beach:
Wards of the wave-lands, green and white,
Scanning the surf from dawn till night—
 Watching the grey whales breach.

Here are the souls of sailors,
 Watching the gulls alight;
Watching the birds that watch the whales
That rise to the surface with ships and sails
 And dive to the depths of night.

There are the gods of oceans,
 Watching the souls of men
That soar like gulls on the wine-dark sea
Or dive to the depths of obscurity.
 Only to rise again.

Loris and Young

Deep in the jungle gloom, unsung,
Upon a bough divided,
There sits a loris with her young
And ponders, undecided;
For, having given recent birth
To yet another primate,
Should she now clamber down to earth
To face a foreign climate
And set her furry little child
Upon a path of glory,
Or keep him in the jungles wild,
Safe in the upper storey?

She contemplates the ground below
And seeks a wise solution
Between a cozy status quo
And further evolution.
She cannot see what lies ahead
Or where her race is going:
She sits and contemplates instead—
Uncertain and unknowing.

Her eyes are brown, her view is wide—
Though lacking second vision;
But worries trouble her inside
With doubt and indecision.
She lacks a tail, that elf forlorn—
She manages without it.

* * *

She says the child is virgin-born—
And who are we to doubt it?



SOMEWHAT SCIENTIFIC SUBJECTS

Dross

“Foreign bodies, other matter,
Aliens of many sorts,
Clutter pristine scenes, and scatter
Rubble over golden quartz.
Junk piles up in mountain ridges”
(Grumbled Granite to Basalt)
“But, however Nature changes,
It is surely not my fault.”

Dust

Before the hills, before the vales—
Before the Earth had solid crust—
There shone, as in the comets' tails,
A glow of interstellar dust.

A later handful of that earth
Was moulded to a human shape,
Engendering, without true birth,
A walking, talking, human ape.

In Egypt, as in Araby,
Where desert wind stirs desert sand,
A cloud, born in the Sphinx's lee—
Dust-devil—blows across the land

And housewives—may their tribe increase!
The feather-dustered ecocrats,
Chase from our mortal mantelpiece
Grey dust, to underneath the mats

While, in another desert land
Where mourns the witless whippoorwill,
The earth is drilled, the rivers panned,
And gold-dust fills the eagle's quill.

Of late, a grim Chernobyl dust,
Corrosive as a lethal ray,
Falls over all the World's good crust—
And careless Man returns to clay.

("Dust" was one of the assigned subjects for the poetry contest in the 1986 *Eisteddfod*. This poem, being in English, would not have been eligible for consideration.)

Instant McBroth

(From small print on the package.)

Double packet saving trouble;
Double saucepan at the double;
Round about the cauldron go;
In the bubbling waters throw:—

Toad and vegetable fat;
Linseed oil for cricket bat;
Leg of frog and eye of ant;
Sugar, anti-oxidant;
Fillet of a skinny skate;
Monosodium benzoate;
Simple sauce of soya bean;
Carraway and carrageen;
Tail of newt and cone of larch;
Shallot, salt, potato starch;
Tangles gathered by the tide;
Added color certified;
Owlet's wing and skimmèd milk;
Powdered artificial silk;
Nose of Turkish belly-dancer;
Desiccated taste-enhancer;
Dextrose and emulsifier ...
Simmer slowly on the fire.

Double-bended, sway and stoop
Till the charm is instant soup:
Toil and trouble obviated
By the packet rehydrated.

Us, the People

The DNA of plasmids can be spread upon a grid
Like trails of littered highways that scored about the countryside.
The intellect of Man confronts his ego with his id—
The genius of Jekyll vies with villainies of Hyde.
Our desperate propensities extend on either hand.
We seek genetic remedies for curing human ills,
Yet manifest a talent for destruction of the land.
Conflicting over matters between good and evil wills,
We seek a better world, from which we struggle to escape.
We engineer the naked gene, yet laud the selfish ape.

* * *

Bushes and Ladders

We are but hollow, broken reeds
In Evolution's bushes.
We do not seek where Virtue leads:
We yield where Nature pushes.
Instead of mounting higher and higher,
Ascending from old apes,
We flee from bold Prometheus' fire
Down Nature's fire-escapes.
We are not heroes that, unsung,
Ascend Dame Nature's ladder
But, climbing downwards, rung by rung,
We go from bad to badder.
And yet, unfazed by metal bars
And theories cladistic,
We seek salvation in the stars,
(*Homo peroptimistic!*)

The Gels

See the pretty, patterned gels—banded gels:

What a subtle sequencing their separation tells!

(Touching terminal solutions may entail electrocutions.)

Poly-n-acrylamide agitates on every side.

Hocus-pocus focussing can justify a gel.

(Agarose by any other name would serve as well.)

Shades of true Coomassie bluing decorate the bio-lab.

See the fractions all accruing—neat analyses ensuing—

On the palpitating slab.

Spots, in parallels and arches, maculate the plated starches.

See the mass of information on the rites of separation

As the correspondence swells

In Dame *Nature's* Book of Kells

Like the boundless desert sands;

Like the Holy German bands;

Like a sacred mass and solemn on a fifth, or seventh, column.

Good St. Arne, final-zonal,

Bless our antibodies clonal

In the differential gradients

With thy scintillating radiants

In the jillions of gels—

In the gels, gels, gels, gels

Gels, gels, gels—

In our plethora of separation gels.

* * *

Anoa

(Why on earth? —or Zoogeography for the Undispersed)

The buccaneer Balboa,
 Who scourged the seven seas,
Discovered the anoa
 Upon the Celebes.
Extending north to Goa
 By several degrees
To east of West Samoa
 Beyond the Hebrides.
It's stouter than the boa,
 More venomous than bees,
And carries loa-loa
 (A horrible disease).
The kiwi and the moa
 That lived among the Keys
Infested Krakatoa
 With phalaropes and fleas.

* * *

Among the Metazoa
 That thrive on chalk or cheese,
It's somewhat strange that Noah
 Should rescue things like these.

The Plumed Serpent

(A lay of Leda and Laocoon)

A snake and a dove are alike, my love
 (As I often assure the missus),
Though it may be true that a dove goes "coo"
 While a serpent only hisses.

A snake and a dove are alike, my love;
 They avoid both cats and cattle.
They have three main parts to their inmost hearts
 And they worship Quetzalcoátl.

A snake and a dove are alike, my love;
 Though a dove is but rarely found
With the kind of nest that a snake likes best
 In a hole in the leafy ground.

A snake and a dove are alike, my love:
 They belong to the self-same firm.
They have beady eyes; lay eggs; eat flies;
 And have almost the same-shaped sperm.

Whose Necks?

(" . . . Our Jurassic egg is pretty certainly from a sauropod dinosaur that . . . looked like a tadpole evenly mounted on four lumpy legs. . . ."
—*New Yorker*, April 19, 1959, p. 31.)

Buried in Jurassic cores
Lie the lanky dinosaurs.
 (Dinosaurs of either sex
 Had the most majestic necks.)

Dusty, too, the warty toads
Flattened on our Recent roads.
 (Toads are tadpoles when they're small,
 With no sign of neck at all.)

Ostriches have necks and legs
When they hatch from mother's eggs.
 (Baby frogs, you may recall,
 Haven't any necks at all.)

Though the squat hyenas laugh
At the angular giraffe,
 Stretching makes him slim and tall.
 (Tadpoles have no necks at all.)

* * *

Write it large across the wall:
Tadpoles have *no* necks at all.

Relative Speeds

The bee, that zooms from hive to flower
At seven million lengths per hour
Can spare no time for mice, that go
Five hundred thousand lengths or so.

But mice run ten times faster than
The best laid schemes of modern man:
Some fifty thousand lengths we get
In racing car or flying jet.

While Bannister, when sorely pressed,
Does 15,000 lengths at best.

The tortoise, when he hits the trail,
May touch a thousand, like the snail;
But this is lightning—for it means
Eight times as fast as ocean Queens.

Our Earth, with all its earthly power,
Goes hurtling through the heavens vast
At seven lengths within the hour.

(A bee's a million times as fast.)

Study Interred

(To the tune of "Coming Through the Rye.")

Cats are nice, and bury theirs.

Rabbits aren't so neat.

Dogs leave various affairs

All along the street.

Snails put little question marks,

Slyly asking why.

Worms are fast at curly cast.

Thank God cows can't fly!

Horses drop their apples, steaming,

Anywhere in town;

Trotting, or just standing, dreaming—

Dogs, at least, sit down.

Seagulls' splashes—chalk and ashes—

Spatter from the sky.

Mice make raisins. Flies blow mirrors.

Thank God cows can't fly!

*I Am a Brother to Dragons, and a Companion to Owls **

1. "That's all," the barber said, "Who's next?"
But I was drowsing on the text
Of some long out-of-date gazette.
My turn, I reckoned, wasn't yet.
2. I put the question, as before,
To fellow creatures in the store.
3. I asked the educated owl,
But he would only sit and scowl.
4. I asked the dragon, as a friend
Of destinies that shape our end.
He breathed a little belch of fire,
And hurried off to Oxfordshire.
5. Leviathan was fast asleep,
But mumbled something from the deep.
6. At last I got the warning word
From quite a dull and dowdy bird:
"You're overwrought" the dodo said,
"And overarmed, and overbred."
"Perverse, purblinded and perplexed,
"Mankind, it seems to me, is next."

* Job 30:29.

The Cleaners

When lambs abort, and cattle die
 In drouth or by the pest,
Their carcasses offend the sky
 And rot to final rest.
But life shall come as life must go
 And seasons turn the scene.
Thank God for beetle, grub, and crow
 That pick the cages clean!

* * *

The Worried Axolotl

An old and infirm axolotl
Enquired of Charles Darwin, "Pray, what'l
 They do when I die? Will they soak me in lye,
Or pickl my bones in a botl?"
Said Charles, "You may worry a litl
Concerning your final aquitl,
 But while you're alive,
 If you ask, who'll survive,
I can tell you at once: the most fit'l."

Unions Mendelian and Morganatic

Someone conditioned a salmon sperm
To fuse with a hamster cell.
The cross was a wan, Wagnerian worm
With a salmony-hamstrous smell.
It had neither feather, nor fur nor scale;
Nor hoof, nor horn, nor hair,
But nine double-fibrils propelled its tail
With the aid of a central pair.
It browsed upon copepods, flies, and chow;
It chewed neither gum nor cud;
And it orientated—we don't know how—
With the magnetite in its blood.
It multiplied at the turn of tide
And headed upstream for bogs,
Leaving its offspring there to abide
Like lemmings or prairie dogs.
But they had to go down to the seas again—
To the lonely sea and the sky—
With a yen, they say, for some B.S.A.
From the hand of a P.S.I.
So some spring night, when the moon shone bright—
Or perhaps in the early fall—
They spawned and mated, and aggregated,
In answer to Nature's call,
And headed out to the open sea,
To the realm of the wild sardine
(With a minimal store of A.T.P.)
At the call of a selfish gene.
They swam offshore with an inborn urge,
Oblivious of the cost,
And virtually none could survive the surge,
And practically all were lost.

So nobody now is left to tell
The tale of the hybrid worm
That grew when they melded a hamster cell
With the germ of a salmon sperm.

* * *

The Ultimate End of the Grollux

I'll tell you about the remarkable grollux.
It sometimes cavorts, and it frequently rollux.
It lives among padlox and fetlox and mattox
And sleeps upon rags and dishevelling tattox
(Preferring pure wool to your satins and sillox).
It ambles on planes and gambols on hillox.
It's subject to chills, but it conquers the collux
With decimal doses of castor and pollux.

The male, with a flexible, helical phallux,
Is even more poplar at parties than salix,
But though he exults in bucolical frolix,
The grollux is hardly appreciably prolix
For, though they have paws with opposable pollux,
The copulous grolluxes haven't got bollux.

When grolluxes strive for uxorial junction
They're prone to cohabit with little conspunction,
And so I conclude that, in spite of their unction,
The race of the grollux is doomed to extunction.

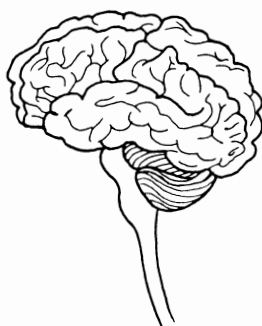
The Abominable Snowman

I met him plodding through the snows,
 A venerable yeti;
The hair hung shaggy from his nose
 Like honey-stained spaghetti.

(A yeti's hard to find, they say,
 And harder still to hunt.
His footprints point the other way;
 His feet are back-to-front.)

And was he out of Elveshjem,
 Or making for Tashkent?
I knew not whitherto he came,
 Or whence he may have went.

MEDICAL



My Nervous System

My nervous system gnaws its nails:
It's worried, tense and shy,
Its confidence or courage fails
When people catch its eye.

My sympathetic system tries
To calm its mate, and me,
And does its best to tranquillize
By kindly sympathy.

This helps a bit, perhaps—and yet,
Whatever people say,
My nervous system seems to get
More nervous every day.

* * *

Neuroses

By any other name
Would smell as sweet new roses—
All redolent the same,
As Nature predisposes.
But then this problem poses
To worry and distress us:
Who wants to breed new roses
While still the old oppress us?

The Middle Way

Until the moment of my birth, the middle of my belly
Was kept supplied with glucoside in Wharton's wondrous jelly.
My being was umbilicous: my body and my soul
Were absolutely governed by abdominal control.
But when, at term, I saw the light, and started respiration,
They cut off my supply lines in o navel operation,
And left me but a cicatrice, an isolated wen,
That never could be dominant or bellicose again.

I breathe the air of freedom now, no longer in its thrall.
That humble dimple doesn't lead to anything at all.
Yet when, in introspective mood, I contemplate the spot
That used to rule my system—though at present it does not—
I wonder about fetal life, before they set me free,
And dream awhile in retrospective omphaloscopy.

* * *

Chewing Gums

On peppermints I used to dine,
And Listerine, and Tums,
But now my breath blows fresh and fine
Past neatly sawn-off gums.

Where bits of autolysing meat
Once lodged between the ridges,
I now have molars, clean and neat,
Among my golden bridges.

My lower teeth are shiny white—
Likewise my gleaming uppers.
I only wish that, every night,
I could afford my suppers.

The Inward Eye

My arms are thin and hairy; my knees are knobbed and scarred.
I'm muzzled like a monkey and I'm grizzled like a pard.

In physical appearance I've grown uglier and old—
But the edges of my retinas are wondrous to behold.

I'm facing grim senility; my body's getting frail
As one by one, my faculty-supporting systems fail.

I can't do push-ups any more, or bend to touch the ground—
But the vessels of my retinas are absolutely sound.

My hearing's growing weaker; my vision's growing dim.
My chance of reaching 80 may be relatively slim.

They'll say about my body when they lay it in the ground,
"His heart and mind were feeble—but his retinas were sound."

* * *

Minnehaha—Passing Water

Old Columbus had a notion—
Some would say, a crazy scheme—
Seeking Indies o'er the ocean,
Noting seaweeds in mid-stream.

Pioneers, with sound and fury,
Travelled west with wagon team,
Fording o'er the wide Missouri,
Changing horses in mid-stream.

Tell me not in empty numbers
Life is but an idle dream.
After meals, or after slumbers,
Take your samples in midstream.

Sweetmeat

(See Jansen, K., 1980. "Meat of Life" *Science Digest* 78)

Eat the product of your labor:

Chew it raw or try it fried;

Share it with your dearest neighbor—

Let your conscience be your guide.

Try to be environmental—

Never mind the bloody taste!

All that protein placental

Should not be allowed to waste.

Do as other mammals do:

Eating afterbirth is fun.

Chop it: pop it in the stew:

Take it on a toasted bun.

Add a little Wharton's jelly:

Season it with sage and salt.

If it seems a trifle smelly,

Wash it down with hops and malt.

Barring sickness or abortion,

Earthquake, flood, or storm at sea,

Plan to get another portion

At the next delivery.

A Spell for Hallow E'en

(To be incanted softly but clearly over an autoclaved pestle and mortar filled with distilled water, tongue depressors, and tadpoles.)

Persil ever washes whiter:

Rinso makes a softer sud:

Castles cross and bishops mitre

At the Sign of Occult Blood.

Every seventh son's a lemon:

Every seventh bomb's a dud.

Angel dust's a double demon—

Mickle, fickle Occult Blood

Sip the cup when wine flows redder.

Nip the roses in the bud.

Fill the fertilizer-spreader—

Horse-manure and Occult Blood.

Hark the final Herald's Dribble,

Passing water—Noah's Flood.

Adam's seed and Adam's rib'll

Bear a trace of Occult Blood.

Glug!

Glub?

Glug.

The Hunter

Nanook of the frozen land,
On a frigid, floating floe
Cast of old, enamelled snow,
Kneels, harpoon in either hand,
Poised to deal a lethal blow
To a seal that swims below.

So kneel I, as by confessor,
Where the flushing waters flow,
With my mighty tongue-depressor
Poised to deal a lethal blow
To my prey, that floats below.

By my kayak toilet-bowl,
Far from seals and Arctic birds,
I, the master of my soul
(Hern the Hunter, Nerd of Nerds)
Stalk the sleek, elusive turds.

Song of the Med. School Alumnus

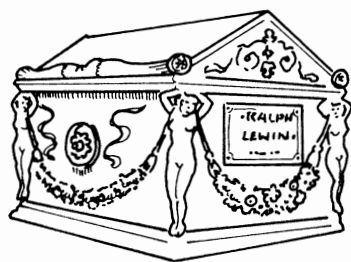
Cogito, et ergo sum
San Diego med. alum,
Healing ills that need attention
In the parts too dark to mention:
Striving hard to overcome:
San Diego med. alum.

Cogito, et ergo sum
San Diego med. alum,
Out to cure the ills of ages,
Corporal or mental rages,
And to tend the common scum;
San Diego med. alum.

Cogito, et ergo sum
San Diego med. alum,
Girt to combat all diseases
With the latest remedieses,
Stethoscope and speculum:
San Diego med. alum.

Cogito, et ergo sum
San Diego med. alum.
One explores, another teaches
On the sunny sandy beaches
(Not so simple, not so dumb:
San Diego med. alum.)

Cogito, et ergo sum
San Diego med. alum:
Intellectus et urbanus
Noziz elbow fromizanus—
Officem et clinicum:
San Diego med. alum.



RELIGION

Good King Wence

(This is a translation of a carol, recently found among the archives of a Bohemian monastery—the same one from which *Good King Wence's Lass* originated.)

Good King Wence the First* went out on the Feast of Esther
For his year-end walkabout with his palace jester.

Lads and lasses on the way made his passage pleasant:
Gave him frankincense and bay, fatted calf and pheasant.

Later, in the palace halls, freed of fur and feather,
Meats were cooked with matzoh-balls. Dined they all together.

Then they sang, both rich and poor, virtuous and wicked:
"Old King Cole" and "Mo aus Zur" as the candles flickered.

Good King Wence's wife looked out from her bedroom windy:
"What's that bawling all about? Why the royal shindy?"

"Bring me wine this noble night: bring me gin and tonic!"
Poor old Good King Wence got tight, something really chronic.

"Hither, page, and hold my hand. Aches my head appalling.
I can now but barely stand, and am prone to falling."

"Look out, Wence!" the jester cried—but, with crash and clatters,
Poor old Wence collapsed beside all those empty platters.

Good King Wence's light went out, after all the candles.
Jesters chuckle still about all those palace scandals.
Far beyond the forest fence, peasants hale and hearty
Tell the tale of Good King Wence and his palace party.

*He was actually First, though he looked Forth.

Leda and the Swan

A god they called Jupiter, Woden, or Thor—
Or Jove or Jehovah, according to lore—
Lived up on Olympus (some call it Valhalla)
With other immortals like Buddha and Allah.
In fields that were fragrant with thyme and with basil,
He dwelt in the shade of an ash called Yggdrasil,
Right up in the hills, by the side of a path,
In a split-level palace (2 bed and 2 bath)
With sauna and pool of celestial blue,
A patio (tiled) and a wonderful view.

He lived with his wife, yclept Frigga or Freda,
But yearned for the love of a lady called Leda
Who dwelt in a village, the Back-of-Beyond,
In a cute little house overlooking a pond.
This Leda, a lissome and lispin young maid,
Had lips like ripe cherries and eyes like brown jade.
Her hair was jet-black, very glossy and fine.
Her face was a picture; her form was divine.

“She’s very attractive” thought Odin (or Jove).
“I’ll take me a walk down Elysian Grove.
I think that it’s time I went hurtling down
And had me the dame for a night in the town.”

But when he presented himself to the maid,
She blushed at his ardor, and grew sore afraid.
“I’ve never made love to immortals before,”
She said with decision, and bolted the door.

But Thor didn't take to so firm a rebuttal,
And thought up a scheme that was bold and yet subtle:
He'd turn himself into a bull, or a shower,
And, thereby disguised, he'd get into her bower.
But bulls are quite scary, and showers are wet:
The lady became even harder to get
Till the plan that he finally lighted upon
Was to turn himself into the form of a swan.

He flew down again to the Back-of-Beyond,
And found his fair Leda asleep by the pond.
He settled beside her, extended his wings,
Fluffed up his white feathers and hackles and things,
Extended his elegant neck on her breast
And lay down to join in her afternoon rest.

But when it grew dark, he unfolded his plan:
The swan retransformed to the shape of a man,
And down in the rushes it soon came to pass
That he hadn't much trouble seducing the lass.

With Leda's affection and Jupiter's might,
They went to it hard for the rest of the night.

Next morning, as Eos was tinting the dawn,
He yawned "Thank you, Leda. Now I must be gone.
"I'm Thor" he revealed, as he kissed her goodbye.
"You thaid it" she groaned, "And, my god, tho am I!"
With that, he departed. He left his fair Leda,
And went back to Hera (or Frigga or Freda).

No longer a maiden, fair Leda conceived,
And bore him a baby, 'tis widely believed;
And if you should ask "Was it god, girl, or boy?"
The answer, they tell us, was Helen of Troy.
(This may seem unlikely. It is, I'll allow,
But it's all I have time to be telling you now.)

Perfect Faith (a Moral Tale)

A tale of faith, and life and death, is this:

A mountaineer fell down a precipice.

A hundred feet he fell, or maybe two,

Until he tumbled by a bush that grew

From some small crevice on the rocky wall

He clutched a branch, and stayed his headlong fall.

For many minutes there the fellow hung

And, as to that slim bramble-bush he clung,

He saw beneath, a thousand feet or so,

The boulders on the valley far below;

While, far above his solitary ledge,

The sky was dark beyond the cliff's high edge.

His hands grew numb; his arms did sorely ache.

"Help me" the fellow cried "for pity's sake."

His shouting echoed from the mountain-side.

"I cannot hold much longer. Help!" he cried

"Or I shall fall and, fallen, surely die.

Is anyone up there to hear my cry?"

Then came a voice, like thunder from the night:

"I hear you, son, and I shall heed your plight.

If you have total, perfect faith in me,

Then fear not death to any slight degree.

You do have perfect faith, beloved son?"

"Most certainly!" replied the hanging one.

"My faith is absolute, in you alone:

But hurry, please—my strength is all but gone."

"Then listen" said the voice from far above.

"As I have might and omnipotent love,

Be not afraid, my son: be not alarmed.

You shall survive this accident unharmed.

Harken to what I say. When I count three,
Release your hold, and fall. Through piety,
On which you set so confident a store,
A bush upon the distant valley floor
Shall cushion your descent, and you shall land,
Unhurt, upon a gentle bed of sand."
The fellow heard; yet, looking down once more,
He saw but boulders on the valley floor
A half a mile below.

He turned his eyes
Once more towards the cliff-edge and the skies
And, with a voice of infinite despair,
Shouted "Is anybody *else* up there?"

* * *

His Aim

There lived an old curmudgeon in the house across the
street—
As surly an old so-and-so as you could chance to meet—
And whether it was warm or cool, in weather fair or foul,
He always could be counted on to greet us with a scowl.
His wife was very sweet and kind, as patient as you please
She did the work of two to let her husband live at ease.
She cared for all the household chores, and gardened on the
side—
Until one day, quite suddenly, she had a stroke and died.
I heard the news from someone I encountered in the park.
"Such acts of God are sad" she said; "His ways are strange and
dark."
She paused a while, then added "But it sometimes seems to me
His aim may not be quite as good as once it used to be."

Planning

A novice in a nunnery, fair Anne,
Spent Sunday night in bed with a young man.
Before he left, before the day was light,
She asked the lad with whom she'd spent the night
For some small token of their act of bliss:
An army penknife, preferably Swiss.
Considering this reasonable need,
The fellow more than willingly agreed
And in the Monday market bought a knife
Combining such necessities of life
As screwdrivers, large blades with double grooves,
And a thing for taking stones from horses' hooves.
That evening, the honest country swain
Climbed back into the nunnery again
And gave her such a knife, its cross of white
A fitting symbol of their Sunday night.
She thanked him; but, before they bade farewell,
She took him back into her humble cell
And showed him that her wooden bedside stand
Was full of army knives from Switzerland.
He paused amazed beside her chamber door
And asked her what so many knives were for.
She answered "Although cloistered as a nun,
My adult life has only just begun.
While I am young, and reasonably fair,
Such opportunities are far from rare:
It isn't hard for me to find a wight
With whom I can arrange to spend a night.
But 30, 40, 50 years ahead
I'll find it harder getting men to bed—
And then I'll dip into my little store
Of army knives, like these and many more,
That in my spring and summer may accrue.

There's little boy-scouts aren't prepared to do
(I'm sure that everyone will understand)
When offered army knives from Switzerland.

* * *

Black Smoke, White Smoke

He likes to hike; he likes to ski;
He likes to read in bed—like me.
He likes to climb; he likes to fly;
He loves canoeing—so do I.
 He speaks Italian and French
 Like any Renaissance-Mensch.
 He's quite an erudite professor,
 Yet tells the truth to his confessor.
He loves the poor and working classes;
He regularly goes to masses
In praise of Heav'n and fear of Hell—
And so do people here as well.
 There's just one thing that I forgot;
 He's now the Pope—and I am not,
 Though I am just as good and
 humble.
 (Well, that's the way the cookies
 crumble!)

* * *

Lamentations 1, 12

To put it squarely on the line,
There is no grief as deep as mine.
If I'm not reconciled in time,
Then none will be so sad as I'm.

O passers-by, look now and see:
There's none more sorrowful than me
(Or none more sorrowful than I)
Except, perhaps, the passers-by.

Accommodation—a Carol

“No room, no room!” the agents said.
“You should have booked some weeks ahead.
According to the tourists’ guide,
We’re always full at Christmastide.”

The infant quickened in the womb,
Yet still the agents said “No room!”
There were no vacancies at all
Except in someone’s ox’s stall.

And there, foretold and yet forlorn,
The Saviour of the World was born,
For there was shelter, after all,
In someone’s humble ox’s stall.

The oxen left some fragrant hay
Whereon the Virgin Mother lay;
And it was really God for whom
The beasts had made a little room.

For a Sarcophagus

When I die, then weigh my heart
 With my faculties together.
Weigh my science with my art:
 Set them all against a feather.

When I cross the last black river
 To the lands beyond the Nile,
Weigh my worries with my liver:
 Set my woes against a smile.

When I pass to ever after,
 Shed upon the golden scales
Tears of woe and tears of laughter;
 Oxen eyes and asses' tails.

Let me join the souls of Horus
 In a transcendental song,
Or some parabolic chorus
 Counterpointing right with wrong.

As I go, then let my singing
 Echo canons from above
In a scale of silence, ringing
 Round the feather of a dove.

* * *

ENGLAND



Thoughts on Picking My Way Across London

Earth hath not anything to show more foul.
Dull must they be of nose, who tolerate
The foetid faeces by the garden gate,
Dispensed by unrestrained canine bowel.

Now more and more our streets seem doomed to bear
The excrements of animals, untrained,
Upon the paving-stones. Since last it rained,
Unsullied paths have grown increasing rare.

Let those who love their pets—a current fad—
Love no less decently their fellow men,
And let our urban ways be clean again.
A turd by other name would smell as bad.

The dirty dogs now let us all condemn,
Together with that antisocial band
Of owners from whose hounds these troubles stem.
We venerate the ground on which we stand,
So let us have a clean Jerusalem
In what was England's green and pleasant land.

View From the Backs of Kings

The college yawns beside the Cam
Where scholars browse and students cram
Or chew the cud beneath the spires
Of academic Gothic byres.
Across the swards beyond the ditch
They join the gay, bucolic rich
While dusty leaves, in tome on tome,
Like dusty roads, turn all to Rome.
Tall, navish arches of old trees
(Grass-willows over mulberries,
As yet uncut for cricket-bats)
Make shade for little summer gnats
That smile, as only insects can,
At man's emphatitute to man.
Where windrows of sweet stained grass
Expose the wholly Roman ass
(For centuries preserved, enshrined,
In spirits of the cloistered mind)
We live and die by slow degrees
Awarded in such fields as these.

The Chapel of the Upturned Sow
Is sacred to the holy cow.

Epitaph: To Elizabeth *

Eliza died—a babe forlorn—
Ere you or I—or she—was born.
Her days were numbered backwardly
She died at minus fifty-three.

*A tombstone in Norwich Cathedral bears the inscription:
“Elizabeth, born 13 April 1736, died 20 February 1736”

A Fantasy of Albion

There was a toad of London Town, as cheeky as you please,
Who climbed into the palace grounds with unexpected ease.
He slithered through the shrubbery and skipped across the green
And managed to intrude into the chambers of the Queen.

The Prince was in the counting-house, a-counting out his money:
The groom was in the pantry, eating gingerbread and honey:
The maid was in the powder-room, a-powdering her nose
And the guards were in the changing-room, a-changing of their
hose.

The Queen rang the guard, and the guard rang the sentry,
Who called to the commissionaire, who rang the palace gong,
But no-one was concerned about the uninvited entry,
And nobody was worried—till a copper came along.

He grabbed the fellow's britches and he shook him by the ears;
He shoved him through the corridors and pushed him through
the hall.

He rushed him to the quarters of the palace musketeers
To teach him that intruders are not welcome there at all.

They shackled him with chains to keep him safely through the
night;

They led him to the Tower by the early morning light.

They dragged him through the dungeons and they flung him on a
block

And they chopped him into segments like a stick of Brighton
rock.

The lesson has been taken now. The royal palace grounds
Are safe from such invaders, being strictly out of bounds
(Except to royal families and servants of the Prince),
And nobody's intruded in the palace ever since.

The Intelligence Man

I'm Boris el-Ballonio, a Foreign Office clerk.
My manners are inscrutable, my countenance is dark.
I stand behind the counter in the Gothic Embassy
And operate with unction, serving Country, God and tea
While, underneath that counter, I'm a dedicated spy,
Collecting information for the Agents X and Y.

I go to Gothic parties, where I drink and womanize,
But under polar glasses I've a pair of beady eyes.
A perma-press attache, I can write without a trace,
Employing micro-pencils from my false attache case.
(My subtle soda-ciphers I occasionally botch
Because, as double agent, I've a yen for double-Scotch.)

I steal among the alcoves of the Polished Corridor,
A double double-dealer for an arm of MI-4.
I shadow shadow-ministers, especially the Prime,
To note their daily movements, or observe them marking time.
I follow them in marketing, recording what they buy,
Condensing the statistics in the dotting of an "i".

My attitude is formal and my protocol's correct.
My loyalties are mutable, and subject to defect.
Some day maybe I'll transfer to another kind of post,
To gather information for whoever pays the most.
I'll sell them privy secrets. (I've already sold my soul.)
I'm Boris el-Ballonio, the Foreign Office mole.

The Bear and Ragged Staff

Within "The Bear and Ragged Staff"
The local gentry stand and quaff
Or sit and dine on tasty fare
Served by "The Ragged Staff and Bear."
The lowest lintel of the house
Bears this injunction: "Duck or grouse"
To warn of bumps and painful luck
For those who fail to bow or duck;
But those who stoop will feel no pain
And have no reason to complain:
So dine at ease, and eat your fill
In B.R.S. on Cumnor Hill.

* * *

A.G.M.

There is a meadow, by St. Clements' Lane,
Bedewed by mists or scented summer rain,
Where fools disport and scholars lightly tread
And greyhounds, neatly groomed and better bred
(Part-dog, part-arrow), lithe with satin'd springs,
Bounding as if equipped with avian wings,
Race on a course of fescue-grass and bent,
While angels hover in the firmament...
A fancied scene of verdant yesterdays
In gay angelic greens and canine greys.

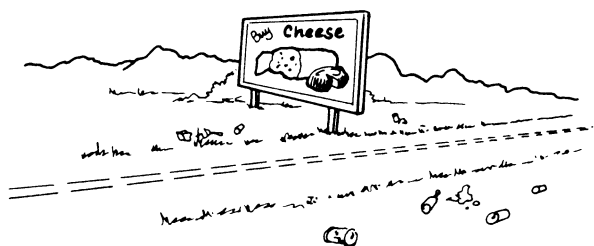
Sweet Isis flows; chill tempests blow in vain:
Angel and Greyhound Meadow, by the Plain.

“The Severn Boar” at Ten

Red balls, white balls, no balls at all:
The spot is in a pocket and the Q’s against the wall.
The cannons now are silent, and the silence cushions on.
The Q’s are in the corner and the P’s go down the john.
They flow into the river, over weirs and over falls
Among the rolling hills again, beside the rolling balls.
They flush across the marshes and they rush into the seas—
A million mixing waters with a pod of potted P’s.

Behind the little tavern, where the P’s went on the wall,
The plots began to thicken, though no Q’s were there at all.
But now the game is over, all the characters have gone;
The chalk is by the mantel, where the candles gutter on.
The barrels have been emptied, leaving nothing but the lees,
And all the ruddy alcohol has gone to making P’s.
Pale ale, dark ale, before the final call—
Red wine, white wine, and no-one left at all.

Time, gentlemen, P’s.



AMERICA

Color Me Butter Yellow

This is Mary Elizabeth Jane.

This is the milk that Mary Jane
Milked from the cattle on Texas Plain
And took in a pail to refill the churn
That had to be trucked into Brattleburn
From Kerry Farm.

And this is the butter and this the cheese
They packed into barrels in quantities
And sent in the vans of the dairy trains
That rattled across the prairie plains
To Randallstown.

This is the timber that made the vats
Secure from predation by mice and rats,
With staves and bars, under ice and salts,
Refrigerated in storage vaults
In measureless caverns concealed from Man
According to some inscrutable plan
In Washington.

Three million tons of this frozen cheese,
At minus forty-seven degrees,
Is hoarded in caves by the farmers' ghosts
To spread on their hungry descendents' toasts
By grandchildren of that Mary Jane
In cities spawned on the Texas Plain
Where once stood Kerry Farm.

On Capitol Hill, the Day After Southey

It was a summer evening,
Old Caspar's work was done.
The Senate's blasted, blackened doors
Still smouldered in the sun;
And by him lay, beside those doors,
The ten surviving senators.

"Now tell us what 'twas all about"
Those sad survivors cried.
"And could we not have done without
This dreadful genocide?"

"It was the Russians," Caspar told,
Who wished to get ahead.
We gave them better than we got"
The crafty Caspar said.

"We blasted even bigger sites,
And even more are dead.
Our armed superiority
Has granted us the victory."

"But what exactly was the cause
And all the missiles for?
Could you not tell us why we got
Into this horrid war?"

"Why, that I cannot say" quoth he—
"But 'twas a famous victory."

The Paradox of Democracy

I generally grumble at
The Lumpenproletariat.

 The eat and drink, and curse and pray;
 They sleep by night and watch by day.

They go to work, they go to sea,
They revel in depravity—
 And yet, however much depraved,
 Humanity is somehow saved.
They run the show and, truth to tell,
It functions reasonably well.

I never cease to wonder at
The Lumpenproletariat.

* * *

P.R.

The front-office black is as cute as you please,
With fancified hair-do's and satiny knees.

 She's fairly adept at distributing mails,
 At answering 'phones and filing (her nails)
So the first to be hired and the last for the sack
Is our charming and elegant front-office black.

Her voice is like honey, her eyes are like sloes;
There's attar-of-roses wherever she goes.

 She scans the agenda, erases a dot,
 And notifies us when the coffee is hot.
Though affirmative action is under attack,
I've fallen in love with our front-office black.

America the Beautiful

'Neath amber skies
The billboards rise
 Along the highways wide,
To block the scenes
Where evergreens
 Once clothed the mountainside.

America the beautiful
 Succumbs to Mammon's plan,
And flip-top cans
Bespangle man's
 Indifference to man.

At beauty spots
The parking lots
 Extend to either hand,
While o'er the plains
The gravy trains
 Pollute the plundered land.

With buggy tracks,
Like income tax,
 From shore to oily shore,
America,
America
 Is beautiful no more.

The buck that stops
On mountain tops
 Is likely to be shot.
(The gentle doe
That hides below
 Is, too—as like as not.)

The fields are free
For DDT
And sticks, and bleaching bones.
The land that was
America
Has gone to Davy Jones.

* * *

Hymn for the Table at Thanksgiving

Supported by your helping hand,
They sowed and reaped, and so contrived
To wrest a living from the land.
Miraculously, they survived.

And we, who sit before this board,
Extend our gratitude again
To you, who shelter us, O Lord,
From peril, pestilence, and pain;

Who nurture all of us that live
Beneath these grey November skies;
Who cherish, educate, forgive,
And bless our mortal enterprise;

Who raise the harvest from the dirt
And succor us from need thereby—
From hunger, hurricane, and hurt,
And having to eat pumpkin pie.

Carol—Christmas 1986

Ron the President looked out
O'er his noble nation,
Seeing Commies all about
Deep in conspiracy.

Ronald Reagan then called forth
From his office casement:
"Bring me Colonel Ollie North
From the White House basement."

"Hither, Ollie, stand by me.
In our new incursions,
We must surreptitiously
Help the honest Persians.

"Let us sell them bombs, perhaps,
In some secret sessions
But don't let the other chaps
Know of our transgressions."

"Sorry, Ronnie" Ollie said,
With a tremor tearful,
"Though one's better dead than red,
I'm a trifle fearful."

"Fear not, Ollie" Ron replied,
"History has shown us
Helping war, on either side,
Brings a massive bonus."

"Sell them guns and planes and stuff,
Even if out-dated.
If we only sell enough,
They'll be extirpated."

“OK, Ronnie,” North agreed,
“Though we may regret it,
I’ll arrange the dirty deed.
You can just forget it.”

Therefore, Christians, be like North:
Keep the nation guessing.
Take the Fifth, while looking forth
With your boss’s blessing.

* * *

Lullaby For a Veep

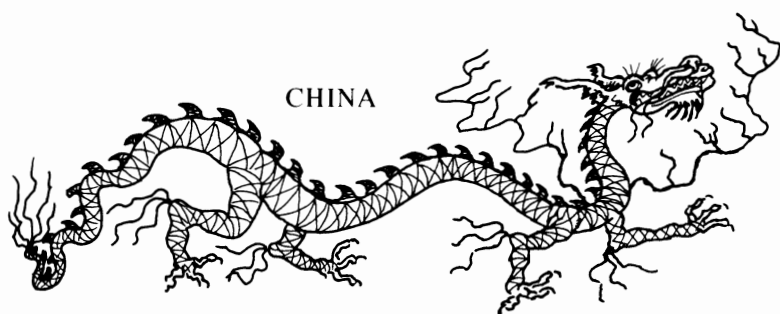
Sing with me
A veep's little lullaby
In case there should ever be
A fun'ral in Paraguay.

Hum along
By bridges and swimming pools
A vice-presidential song
For opening Sunday schools.

Blow your horn—
Your hollowest melody—
For blessing the harvest corn
(Political apogee).

Mumble on:
Inaugurate county fairs
Or open a marathon
With vice-presidential prayers.

Pray with me
When dollars and wells go dry:
Perhaps there won't ever be
A fun'ral in Paraguay.



Chinese New Year Song

On the first day of New Year, my *ai-ren* sent to me:
a mouse in a mulberry tree.

On the second day of New Year, my *ai-ren* sent to me:
two Jersey bulls and a mouse in a mulberry tree.

On the third day of New Year, my *ai-ren* sent to me:
three tiger cubs, two Jersey bulls, and a mouse in a mulberry
tree. ... (etc.)

On the twelfth day of New Year, my *ai-ren* sent to me:
twelve pigs a-grunting
eleven dogs a-hunting
ten cocks a-crowing (*cock-a-doodle-doo-oo!*)
nine monkeys miming
eight goats a-climbing
seven horses leaping
six serpents creeping
five dragons winged ...
four March hares
three tiger cubs
two Jersey bulls
and a mouse in a mulberry tree.

On Seeking Greener Pastures

The noble emperor, Bau Wei
Had diamonds and jade to spare.
He ruled a land in far Cathay
With palaces from here to there.
And when his empress grew too old
For pleasures in the royal bed,
He left her side—so we are told—
And took a concubine instead.

* * *

Across the lands and oceans wide,
On hills of lavender and pine,
The baron Hannes occupied
A row of castles on the Rhine.
And when his baroness declined
The better things of private life,
He left her side and went to find
A younger and more vital wife.

* * *

So long ago, so far apart—
In China or beside the Rhine—
In matters of the flesh and heart,
Their histories were much like mine.

Seen From the Shanghai Train

Along the low embankment
 Among the sooty signs,
He tends his dusty charges,
 The shepherd of the lines.

Below the tarry sleepers
 Where none but nettles sleep,
He watches over nature
 And little flocks of sheep.

Undaunted by expresses,
 Untrammelled by the trams,
His pastoral existence
 Revolves around his lambs.

Expresses thunder northbound
 And Pullmans rumble south,
But he is trained to patience
 And life from hand to mouth.

Below the path of cinders
 Where levelled track declines,
He wards a rubble pasture—
 The shepherd of the lines.

Liu and I

To see the Gwansi countryside
I come with comrade Liu—
A trusted friend and learned guide—
To contemplate the view.

The day is relatively fine.
We stand on common stone.
Her name is much the same as mine,
Though with another tone.

Upon a steeped peak we stand,
The other Liu and I,
Where Gweilin fingers from the land
Meet cloudbanks from the sky.

And, from a Gweilin mountainside,
We watch the streams below
Where trees embrace, and houses hide,
And boats ply to and fro'.

For East and West again are one,
And all mankind is kin.
We stand beneath our common sun
On mountains at Gweilin.

An Evening by the Huang-he-lou

The Yang-tze River, deep and slow,
That flows beside the Huang-he-lou
Has far to come, and far to go,

 To reach the Yellow Sea;
And, in the waning light of day,
When sunset glow gives way to grey,
We put our mortal cares away
 And sit beneath a tree.

Migrating cranes, in languid flight,
Draw chevrons in the evening light
And disappear into the night
 Of dim posterity;
But still the sounds of passing wings
Remain, remembered echoings,
And peasants, paupers, fools, and kings
 Are stirred to poetry.

The Huang-he-lou is not so high—
It reaches vainly to the sky—
But bard Li Bai, and even I,
 Can sense its dignity;
And, as the city lanterns glow,
We sing of currents far below:
The roiling yellow floods that flow
 To join the Yellow Sea.

Heptameters Inscribed on China

- Tourists* Standing, somewhat helplessly,
 Gathered in a little group—
 Less like fishes in the sea,
 More like noodles in a soup.
- Cranes across the sky* Cranes that fly across the land—
 One by day and two by night—
 Soar above the cranes that stand
 On a city building site.
- Flowers* Snowy waterfalls, that bloom
 On the little cherry tree,
 Cannot rival the perfume
 Of the jasmine in my tea.
- Watching a Country Dance* Graceful ladies, picking tea,
 Weave the branches for a wreath.
 Dancing ladies smile at me.
 Smiling back, I pick my teeth.
- Swallows' Nests* Swallows, winging from the East,
 Meet a swallow from the West
 Seeking mud to make a nest.
 (Mud will do, but spit is best.)
- Water Scenes* Weeping willows; summer rain;
 Streams across the country maps;
 Puddles by a flooded drain—
 And, of course, the dripping taps.

- Street Sweepings* Masked and gloved, she stoops and sweeps
 Peels and litter on the road
 Into tidy little heaps
 For a later barrow-load.
 Leaves join litter in the breeze—
 Man's no messier than trees.
- Chopsticks* Love, like chopsticks, needs but two;
 Three's too many, one's too few.
- Slogan* To celebrate our final day,
 We went downtown to drink and dine—
 And in the morning, cool and grey:
 "Long live the Party," said the sign.
- Zebra Crossing* They asked him what he thought about
 The zebras in the Zoo.
 He answered that, with little doubt,
 They were ma-ma, hu-hu.
- For Reflection* "Mirror, mirror on the wall,
 Tell me, as a simple fact,
 Am I fairest of them all?"
 ...
 Wordlessly, the mirror cracked.



OTHER NATIONS

Other Nations, Other Ways

Whatsoever ails your land,
Unforeseen or underplanned,
Everywhere the cry's the same:
U.S.A. must take the blame.

Have you insufficient arms
For dispelling war's alarms,
For attack or defense?
Blame our lack of influence!

Is your populace distraught,
Underfed or overwrought?
If they then resort to force,
Blame America, of course!

Does your president or king
Mope and pine, or dance and sing?
Stay at home, or go away?
Blame it on the U.S.A.

Does he hustle into jail
All the candidates that fail?
Does he let the felons free?
Bomb the U.S. embassy!

If at times we may have played
Helping roles with foreign aid,
Never think a word of thanks:
Take the cash, and blame the Yanks!

Were you smitten by a flood?
Are your cities steeped in blood?
Do your waters freeze or foam?
Blame the Yanks, and send them home!

Never mind what ails the land—
Act of God or rebel band—
Let the Devil have his day
And blame it on the U.S.A.

* * *

Wasserklosett

The ancient robbers of the Rhine
Demand no more illegal tolls.
In fort or ferry, rain or fine,
They ply new predatory roles.
Beside the fragrant Primrose Path
Where travellers have come and gone,
Descendants of those Knights of Bath
Are now the Jackals of the John..

As washroom wardens, night and day,
They prey on all who come to pee,
And everyone has now to pay
A 20-pfennig peeing fee.
So noble Germans of the West—
In spite of modern liberty—
Are still, in this respect, oppressed
By feudal toiletocracy.

*How We Bring the Good News South,
from Gdansk and Gdover*

From Poland, where it snows and snows
And England, where it rains,
The information traffic goes
In predetermined lanes.
Dame Immigration keeps the score
In vast computer files
Along the Polish corridor
And in the British aisles.
Although dim Baltic amber lights
Are set to give us pause,
We pilgrim through the noble nights
To seek a warmer cause.
Until the final bugle blows
To halt our laggard train,
We travel on from British might
Towards a Spanish Main.

* * *

Mystery

I asked them in the 'buses and I asked them in the trains.
I asked them up and down the steppes and on the open plains.
I asked the men in Moscow and I asked the men in Minsk—
What happened to the other half of Semipalatinsk?

The Hmong

Famed for legend and for song
Are the hminstrels of the Hmong.
In a hmass, or hmerely single,
Hmong hmusicians like to hmingle
Hmodestly among the throngs
In the hmarkets of the Hmong,
Telling stories, singing songs
Of the hmighty deeds of Hmong.
Since they try to keep in hmind
Hmoral hmodels of hmankind,
Hmong hmelodious tradition
Is a hmine of erudition:
People chanting tales in Hmong
Hardly ever get them hrong.

I.M.

She came from just the likes of us—
 A little gift of God,
But she moved forward in a 'bus
 Where none of us had trod.
She road in stylish gravy trains
 (Until the last hurrah's).
She gloried in financial gains
 And half a hundred bras.
Where commoners like us were barred,
 She struck a regal role.
She smiled upon the palace guard—
 And bought another stole.
Her man was puggy-nosed and paunched,
 But what had she to lose?
She had a pretty face, that launched
 A thousand pairs of shoes.

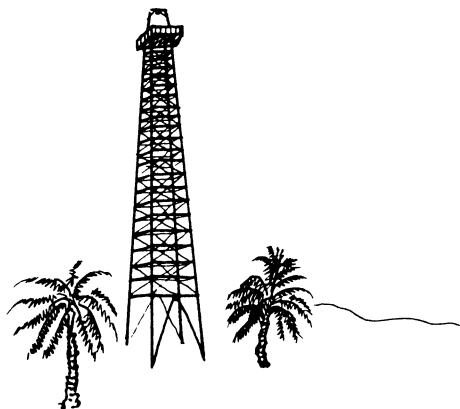
The Sultan and the Princess

The Sultan of Swat had an Arabic yen
For the Palatine Princess of Pa.
He besought her in marriage, again and again,
But the Palatine Princess, oblivious of men,
Would only say “g” (she declined to say “ya”)
As she clung to her aging mama.
The Sultan implored her in Danish and Dutch:
He pleaded in Swedish and Swatch.
He pressed his best suit when he asked for her hand
But the Palatine Princess did not understand,
And he couldn’t advance it a notch.
The Sultan set off for the Kingdom of Pa
And applied at the Palatine gates;
But the Princess said nought, or she counted to ten,
Rejecting his overtures over again
And declining his offers of dates.
The Sultan considered presenting his case
In the erudite language of Pa,
But its grammar is odd and its spelling is strange;
Its tenses and tones have a terrible range,
And he couldn’t tell “Oh” from an “Ah.”
So he dropped his mock-Danish, dismantled his Dutch,
And he tried Esperanto instead—
And the Princess of Pa, saying “Ta very much,”
Accepted his suit, and she took it as such
With a nod of her Palatine head.
Then the Princess of Pa took her leave of mama.
She married the Sultan of Swat,
And agreed to embark from the Palatine Ark
For a cruise in the Sultanate yacht.
And now the Celestial Sultana of Swat,
In a silk ceremonial dress,
Sails from starboard to port as the Queen of the Court,
Since she chose to say, graciously, “Jes!”

The Sultan of Oman

When the Sultan isn't busy ruling Oman—ruling Oman—
Or engaged in simple play or honest oil—honest toil—
The he loves to join the sybaritic Roman—-ritic Roman—
And listen to the gurgle of the oil—of the oil.
He's adept at guessing Soviet intentions—-et intentions—
When his diplomatic duty's to be done—to be done—
And he doesn't relish foreign interventions—interventions—
O, a Sultan's life is not a simple one—simple one.

When the Sultan isn't driving his Mercedes—his Mercedes—
Or directing from his diplomatic helm—matic helm—
Then he likes to mix with gentlemen and ladies—men and
ladies—
And the ordinary mortals of his realm—of his realm.
He would rather drive a Porsche than an Audi—than an Audi—
And he'd rather have more butter than a gun—than a gun—
So, in view of all the problems with the Saudi—with the Saudi—
O, a Sultan's life is not a simple one—a simple one.



Opec All You Faithful

On the First Day of Ramadan my true love gave to me
An oil-well beside a palm tree.

On the Second Day of Ramadan my true love gave to me
Two silver Rolls, and an oil-well beside a palm tree.

On the Third Day ...
Three gold Cadillacs

On the Fourth day ...
Four condominiums
Five Mercedes-Benz
Six sacks of rubies
Seven camels leaping
Eight spies a-creeping
Nine sheiks a-shaking
Ten steaks a-baking

...

(On the remaining 20 days of Ramadan my true love went off
in one of his yachts with one of his other friends ...)

Cargoes

Rule, Liberia—Liberia rules the waves.
There's no-one so free as we liberated slaves.
 In calm or breeze in all degrees
 And varied water motions
We claim the freedom of the seas
 On all the briny oceans.

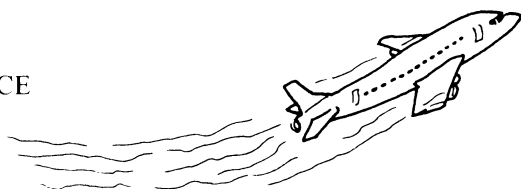
If you want to ship turkeys to Turkey,
 Or guns to a sheik or a shah,
Then charter a freighter
And, sooner or later,
 They'll sail under Flag Panama.

Three cheers for the queens of the ocean—
 Three cheers and a hip-hip-hoorah!
Sign up for a trip
On a capital ship
 Under charter to Flag Panama.

So ...
If you've an honest broker
 And a fairly honest banker,
Then rent a ship
To take a trip—
 A freighter or a tanker—
To cart your spoils, or beers, or oils,
In jars or bags, beneath the flags
 Of fair Liberia.

If you've a crop of grass or pop
 For ready sale or barter,
Then ship your wares
At cut-rate fares
 On a Panamanian charter.
At lower prices, when even Jesus saves,
Fair Liberians never shall be slaves.

FLIGHTS INTO SPACE



Flight Take-off

I'm all set for take-off. I'm ready to fly,
To square the Great Circle with π in the sky.
My nose has been powdered. My tresses are permed.
My seating consignment is over-confirmed.
My hat and my coat, in an oversized pack,
Are cosily stowed in the overhead rack.
My hurry-on luggage sits under my feet.
My belt is tight-buckled, and upright my seat.

We three in row seven are gathered together
To glide under rainbows or over the weather.
We smile at each other. We stifle a cough.
We swallow a pill, and prepare to take off—
But all the ground coffee and ground personnel
Can't settle accounts and my stomach as well.

* * *

Distaff and Shuttle

There's little curvature in sight—
Less oxygen in space.
Twins, parting at the speed of light,
Outreach the human race.

No shadows dim the vaulted sky;
No showers damp the sea.
There is no end in sight for π ,
Nor sag at zero-g.

Airborne

Come with us a-jumbo-jetting:
Fly with us to distant parts.
Travel wisely, not forgetting
Foreign foods and foreign arts.

Lose no time, and lose no glasses;
Treasure travel-agents' notes;
Let's not lose our boarding passes
In the pockets of our coats.

Girt with safety belt and buckles—
Seatback table stashed away—
We may sit and gnaw our knuckles,
Dream, or doze, or sit and pray.

Through the clouds and over oceans—
Through the upper atmosphere—
Fragrant with sweet toilet lotions
From the washrooms in the rear.

In our lunch tray's plastic gutter
Toothpicks soak with wayward peas,
And a pat of melted butter
Slips unnoted to our knees.

Facial tissues, moist and scented,
Find their way into our tea,
While the earphones, duly rented,
Offer rock or symphony.

As the prerecorded choirs
Drown the flutter of our hearts,
Here we go, the frequent fliers,
Jetting off to distant parts.

It All Depends on One's Attitude

Introduction The N.A.S.A. has a solemn mission
 To aid the erring human race
 By using rocket force or fission
 To do experiments in space.
 There's also Women's Liberation
 That has, among its vital goals,
 To free all women from submission
 That may oppress their female souls.

The problem In normal mission'ry position,
 The man lies prone upon the dame,
 Thus subjugating her condition
 (Or so the Women's Libbers claim)
 Because in copulat'ry action,
 It's her unenviable fate
 To try achieving satisfaction
 Beneath her male companion's weight.

Method So we propose a small improvement
 For lightening her mortal load,
 Allowing intercoursal movement
 By mating in a better mode,
 And we've conceived this small petition,
 Submitted by my spouse and me,
 To practice orbital coition
 Way out in space at zero-g.

Summary With ministerial permission,
 Repectfully we wish to try
 To use the mission'ry position
 And do it lightly in the sky.

* * *

The Wanderers

As Voyagers orbit in Jupiter's glow
The refugees trudge in the highways below.
 They follow a path by crumbling wall—
 And the red spot of Jupiter watches it all.

From blood and from sorrow, through dust and through dung,
From Mimot to Korat to Molu and Strung,
 The bullock carts creak as they trundle along—
 But the song of the spheres is an echoing song.

The voice of Callisto sets comets astir,
But nobody sings in the lands of the Khmer.
 Europa and Ganymede start at the call—
 And the watcher of Io is watching it all.

With rocket computers we reach for the stars,
Bedevilled by fate and the red eyes of Mars:
 But where do they fit in the overall plan
 That matters so much—or so little—to Man?

* * *

Orbits

The sun sets daily in the west
 (Or seems to, due to world rotation),
Reducing light, and bringing rest,
 By periodic occidation.

The moon revolves in an ellipse
 Around our earthly domesticity,
Obliging us to come to grips
 With semilunar eccentricity.

Eccentric Orbits

The ellipse of the Moon is a kilo of brie—

Its x somewhat less than its y .

Its path is a steady dV upon t

In the form of a π in the sky.

The Man in the Moon became old very soon,

And smarter appreciably later.

His body grew old and his skin became cold

And he wrinkled from crater to crater.

The glimmer of Mars is agleam with the stars,

But his rays have a bloodier tinge.

His face bears the score of the craters of war

And the light of the lunatic fringe.

* * *

Noises OPH*

A cloud of interstellar dust (so claims a learned prof.)

Obscures the ray that comes our way from distant α OPH.

It may be moderately dense, though of a modest mass.

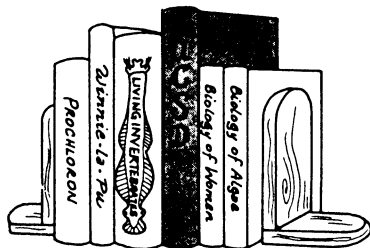
Some have avowed it is a cloud of interstellar gas,

Evolved, perhaps, not long ago. It seems both cool and grey—

A spot of shade that tends to fade beside the Milky Way.

*See: Paresce, F. Structure of the local interstellar medium and the line of sight to α OPH. *Nature* **302**, 806 (1983).

ACADEME AND MISCELLANEA



U.C.S.D.

(The tune could be that of Pooh Bah's
As in a month you have to die ...)

Some places have an acronym

Like suny, cal, and mit.

They're good to shout: you spell them out—

The letters seem to fit.

But by some sad perversity

We're clearly out of luckst:

Our noble university

Abbreviates to *ucsd*.

We come to study chemistry

Or do phys. ed. or bio.

Or even oceanography

Here by the sea at sio.

But it looks silly on our cars,

And sillier on truckst

If we, without particulars,

Inscribe them simply *ucsd*.

We'd like a neat appellative

Like joides, say, or bart.,

To stand for where we work and live,

In science or in art;

But now, with feelings somewhat mixed,

I think that we are stuckst:

Our acronym's been firmly fixed:

Our institution's *ucsd*.

Yet, though our rhyme's peculiar

And sounds a trifle loony,

In scholarship we're better far

Than mit or cal or suny.

I can't see where we go from here,

So now I'll pass the buckst

To people in some future sphere

At sio or at *ucsd*.

College Bookstore

Beer mugs, T-shirts, calculators, keys:
College-lover's note-book covers—dossiers for degrees:
Pocket lenses, ball-point pens, picture-frames and hooks—
And books, books, books, books, books,
 books, books, books!

Let Harvard have her tailored suits, her gold-encrusted pots,
Her hand-embellished riding boots, her rocking-chairs and
 yachts.
We've clips and clamps and reading lamps (*PRO LIBRIS FIAT LUX*)
And miles and miles of groaning aisles of books, books,
 books, books, books!

Approximation

Ours was a distant friendship, at the start—
An ocean and a continent apart.
 I wrote, and so did you.
Then, wafted by the vagaries of fate,
And separated by a single state
 (Or maybe even two)
You moved, and so the distances came down.
You took a job, much nearer to my town;
 And sometimes we would 'phone.
It was a year or more since first we met.
The nights so long, seemed even longer yet
 When I remained alone.
At times you stayed. We drew a shady line,
With only walls between your arms and mine.
 And now, at this address,
We lie together, parted by no wall:
The thickness of a night-dress, that is all—
 Or, often, even less.

Lord Chancellor's Song

(After W.S. Gilbert)

Our University, system-wide,
Has this most inconvenient side:
 Though pledged to practice democracy,
 It's quite unfair to the likes of me.

The University, where I reign,
Is egalitarian (in the main):
 Its rules are just (or ought to be)
 For everybody—excepting me.
A trying situation for
An intellectual chancellor.

Ad hoc committees, who strive to guide,
Present their findings on every side,
 Submitting their bland reports to me
 And recommending unanimously ...
From the noblest dean to the meanest prof,
I sign them on (or I lay them off):
 Step one to two, step two to three—
 But nobody does the same for me.
It's really most frustrating for
A fairly acceptable chancellor.

And candidates who obtain degrees
From bachelors to their PhDs
 Receive certificates, which I sign—
 But no-one's entitled to sign on mine.
For a sheepskin black or a sheepskin fair—
From any department—I don't much care—
I'd pay them a regraduation fee,
 But there's never a suitable one for me,
Which is exasperating for
An ex-professional chancellor.

Orlando's Choice

If music be the food of love, play on!
If not, be silent, fiddler: be gone!
We cannot feed sweet airs to hungry troops
Or make the Tales of Hoffmann into soups.
Such combinations might be worth a try —
A piece of music with a piece of pie —
But people cannot live by airs alone;
We need some sustenance as well as tone.

So judge us hungry mortals not too crude
Who season food of love with love of food.

* * *

Fragment (after Spenser)

They shouted his illustrious name
 From far Olympus to the sea
When Helios to Athens came
 To woo the fair Asilone.

Antigone then wept alone,
 For Polyos advised that she
Should seek seclusion, and atone
 In distant Dimethicone.

Great graven images of jade,
 Black marble and chalcedony.
Commemorate that Attic maid—
 Ill-fated young Asilone.

Sigh No More Ladies

A petticoat Diogenes,
She roves around the camp,
Beside the lake, beneath the trees —
The Lady of the Lamp.

An Iron Maiden, Joan of Arc,
Was martyred at the stake.
The nannies of St. James's Park
Were Ladies of the Lake.

The Lady Jane, who lost her head —
As Windermere her fan;
Godiva, who — but barely wed —
Rode bravely in the van.

A punter at the shallow end —
The Lady of Shallot.
The French lieutenant's lady-friend
Did — or perhaps did not.

Are there such noble dames today
As ladies were of yore?
Dame Fortune frowned on such as they
So, ladies, sigh no more.

* * *

Brrr - Brrr - Brrr

All of our agents are busy.
No-one can come to the phone.
But please do not get in a tizzy.
Or gripe at our occupied tone.
(I'm not playing hookey or sleeping:
I'm sitting outside for a tan.)
Please bear with our bells and our beeping;
We'll answer as soon as we can.

Skinny Ginnies

Smoking Skinny Ginnies, girls,
Is one of women's rights.
You're free to choose, chew gum, or booze,
And sleep around at nights.

You've come a long way, Baby.
You've certainly come far.
You're fragrant as a kipper
And your kisses taste like tar.

A girl who smokes, tells dirty jokes,
And coughs through half the nights,
Is exercising sooty lungs
Along with human rights.

Feel free to use a pack or two —
Or six or seven, maybe.
A woman who pollutes the air
Has come a long way, Baby!

You don't wear bib-and-tucker now —
Not even mini-bib —
And smoking Skinny Ginnies
Is a sign of Women's Lib.

Black socks today are quite passé,
So, too, are bras and pinnies;
So, come what may, just puff away
At stinking Skinny Ginnies.

Sheets (After Keats)

When to my closet I retire,
 Illumin'd by the evening star,
Then minor miracles transpire:
 My sheets become triangular.

I pull them up around my chin
 And draw a selvedge to my nose,
But, in a little, I begin
 To sense a draught around my toes.

And when I struggle to enfold
 And tuck them down around my feet,
My shoulders start to feel the cold
 From insufficiency of sheet.

Then if by fortune I succeed
 In covering both feet and chin,
The wily winds of winter lead
 To frigid hip of chilly shin.

Yet, by the rosy light of dawn,
 When I examine them with care,
By sunbeams through the curtains drawn,
 My sheets are evidently square.

Like blankets and like counterpane.
 They pass Pythagora's test--
Four-normal-cornered once again,
 Rectangular like all the rest.

My sheets appear to be alive.
 Although their spirits shun the light.
How otherwise could they contrive
 To shed a corner in the night?

The Prince of Pees

When Britain stood in high respect
As monarch of the seas,
Whatever commoners suspect,
Her noblemen did not collect
Reserves of common pees;

But lately in Los Angeles
A prince of Belgian line
Assembled pots of people's pees
For ultimate analyses
(For dope or anodyne).

Prince Alexandre de Mérode
In nineteen eighty-four,
Amassed a cellarful or lode
Of samples for his great commode:
His golden liquor store.

Encrated under lock and key-
Unspecified by names--
Those litres of athletic pee
Are bottled for posterity-
The next Olympic Games.

* * *

Keepers

Some people keep chickens---
Keep sniffing---
Keep slim---
While others just keep
Getting stout;
But though you may seek
Cash or counsel this week,
For the present, I beg you,
Keep Out!

Summer Mood

When the sultry sun is hot
And the days are dry,
In the gardens of the land
Nature takes the upper hand
And the winds blow by.

When the torrid sun has set
And the shadows fall,
In the gardens of the mind
Nobody expects to find
Anything at all.

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If . . .

If it sounds like someone beating on a pot—

It's modern music.

If you can't tell if they're tuning up or not—

It's modern music.

If it hasn't any melody and hasn't got a key,

And acts on other people as it tends to act on me

(To make me want to leave the room, to take a snack or pee)—

It's modern music.

If pictures look like accidental spills,

They're modern art.

If people look like pedestals, or pills—

That's modern art.

If nothing seems in focus except dribbles on a screen;

If figures have utensils where their faces should have been

And all that isn't grey is daubed a dirty shade of green—

That's modern art.

If the stanzas have no rhythm and the verses have no rhyme—

It's modern poetry.

If the meanings stagger wildly from the dumb to the sublime—

It's modern poetry.

If many words are dirty and the others are obscure,

Assembled without order like kebabs along a skewer,

And it seems to have no ending (though one can never be sure)

Yes, Virginia—There Is An Easter Bunny

What could be that furry thing
That, at Eastertide,
Symbolizes rites of Spring
Through the countryside?

It cannot be hen or rabbit:
Hens have but two legs,
Whereas rabbits lack the habit
Of producing eggs.

There are few exotic creatures
That create both eggs and milk,
Thus combining bird-like features
With mammalian ilk.

Eggs and milk (and maybe cream)
Are produced, it seems to us,
Only by a monotreme—
Ergo—Paschal Platypus!

CONFERENCES AND EXPEDITIONS

E pluribus tedium

I mumble thanks, or tip my hat—
My life is full of small conventions;
In common courtesies like that
I merit honorable mentions.

But big conventions, I'm afraid,
Oppress me to be gauche and dour:
My gentle traits begin to fade,
And I grow brusquer by the hour.

I soon despair of bonhomie
And shed my friendliness beguiling.
I get convention-fellah's knee;
My zygomatics ache from smiling.

I dread the smoky atmospheres
Of little rooms in big hotels,
And all those mediocre beers
I take to humor petty swells.

I look askance at cheery nods;
I sidle past the shoulder-patters,
And thank my everlasting gods
For bed, the only spot that matters.

I hate this catalog I tote,
This bold identifying label.
I long to leave the sinking boat,
And slip away, when I am able,

To dream of spring and robins' song,
Of trees and grass, or sea and sail,
While speakers rumble on too long,
And microphones and lanterns fail.



Forty Yards On

Forty yards on when, afar and asunder,
Parted are those who are starting from here,
Some will look back, and regretfully wonder
What has become of the faltering rear.
Then, it may be, there will often come o'er you
Visions of specimens trampled or missed.
Slow your advance into prospects before you;
Pause to fill in a few gaps in your list.

Follow up, follow up, follow up,
Till the wood rings again and again
With the tramp of the twenty-two men . . . follow up!

Then it may be that the end of the party,
Lagging of foot, but in diligence strong,
Think of the van in its progress so hearty,
Wonder, perhaps, if their path has been wrong.
Let us implore the botanical tortoise—
While you can see where the others have gone,
Quicken your paces until you have caught us,
Till we unite again, forty yards on.

Follow up, follow up, follow up,
Till the wood rings again and again
With the tramp of the twenty-two men . . . follow up!

Epitaph for a Phascolarctus

Somewhere in the leaves up there
Dozes a koala bear,
Hidden by the vegetation
Of his own kohabitation.

In this eucalyptic thicket,
Girdled by a concrete picket,
Hidden by transplanted trees
From the far antipodes

Here he was koeducated,
Reached maturity, and mated
With occasional koition
In the usual position.

Though his friends and korelations
Gathered round on such occasions,
None of them seemed much to care
For the sight they had to bear.

Walled in, yet emancipated;
Placid; komatose when sated;
Here he grunted, wheezed and sighed;
Guzzled, overate, and died;

And—as all must, sooner, later—
Joined the Great Kooperator
Up the long koeval stairs
In the Heaven of the bears.

* * *

In the leafy clouds up there
Dozes a koala bear,
Hidden in the vegetation
Of his last kohabitation.

Caveat emptor porcellorum

Behold the noble guineapig,
 A distant cousin of the rabbit's.
He has no tail; he's not as big;
 He lacks his cousin's nasty habits.

He doesn't bite; he has no smell.
 Consider, too, his ease of feeding.
His broods may not be large, but—well,
 He compensates by extra breeding.

He catches all the best diseases
 From sunny Spain or old Peru
(Well, *almost* anything that pleases
 His conquerors—excepting “flu.”)

The British medics, from of old,
 Have reckoned guineas as their fees;
Thus jointly interchanged with gold
 Are cavies and Hippocrates.

How proud, despite his humble lot!
 How versatile the noble cavy!
Don't relegate him to the pot
 Or boil him down to guinea-gravy!

We sit in numbed and serried ranks,
Immobilized by social laws
Until the chairman's final thanks
Are drowned in eddies of applause.

Then mercifully, bleary-eyed,
And not a little addle-pated,
We part for homes where we can hide
Secluded and uncongregated.

And yet, in spite of good intentions,
I soon shall board a parting plane
And sally forth to far conventions,
To suffer sadly once again.

Impelled by dimly hidden springs,
Obedient to the herding call,
I leave my old, familiar things
And go to be conventional.

The Old Phytologists *

Each Saturday, we breathed the special aura
Of breck or fen, or marshes by the sea.
We went with raincoat, vasculum, and flora,
A pencil, notebook, sandwiches, and tea.

Mays came and went; then, in our diaspora,
Long past Part II—the World was our Part III—
We travelled far with vasculum and flora,
With pencil, notebook, sandwiches, and tea.

In Pago Pago, as in Bora Bora,
In Innsbruck, Invercargill, Innisfree,
We still took raincoats, vasculum, and flora,
A pencil, notebook, sandwiches, and tea.

And now, in the committees and the quora
That drain our patience and our ATP,
We dream of sunshine, vasculum, and flora,
Of pencil, notebook, sandwiches, and tea.

* R. A. L. 1975. In *Humphrey Gilbert-Carter*, edited by
J. S. L. Gilmour and S. M. Walters. Cambridge.

Epitaph

I came to live, I came to love
 When in the world above,
Till Death, unmindful of my worth,
 Consigned me to the earth.
And now, beneath the teeming sod,
 I come at last to terms
Perhaps with all-embracing God,
 But certainly with worms.

APPENDIX

*Mi estas kompleza al bestoj: nokta epizodo**

*Kontraŭ vitro nevidata
Eta neĝopilko batas —
Mola nokta papilio
Per la kupra kapo gratas.*

*Ĉesu, kompatinda besto!
Vi neniam ĝin traboros;
Nur difektos la okulojn
Kaj vi certe kapdoloros.*

*Malfermante la fenestron,
Demetinte la fontplumon,
Mi enlasas la anĝelon
Kiu flirtas en la lumon.*

*Kvazaŭ duon-blindigite,
La tineo fluge maŝas,
Teksas sur la blanka muro
Kaj, per flugilado, draŝas*

*Inter surpaperaj floroj;
Kolizias kun malhela,
Samaspekta ombruleto
Sur plafono ŝajnĉiela.*

*Turniĝante al la lampo,
Ĝi krakigas la surfacon
De varmega lumigilo,
Tute ne sentante lacon.*

*Sed, per frenezega flugo,
Bruliginte la antenojn,
La malsaĝa best' daŭrigas
Siajn ŝanceliĝajn penojn.*

*Tia sensingarda ago,
Post sufiĉe da ripeto,
Estas certe memmortiga.
Haltu! Haltu, anĝeleto!*

*Do mi ĉasas la insekton,
Relasinte la skribadon,
Klopodante lin allogi
En gapantan fingrokradon.*

*Jen la inko, elverŝita,
Nigre fluas sur la paĝon,
Sed mi kaptas mian gaston
En sekuran pugnokaĝon.*

*Zorge mi ĝin metas mole
Sur la sojlon de fenestro,
Kaj mi tion-ĉi refermas.
Nun, denove studejestro,*

*Kun kontento mi rigardas
Kiel, de la trabo randa,
Griziĝante per vibrado,
Ĉiam pli kaj pli malgranda,*

*La tineo, ekfluginta
Animeto de neĝero,
Brilas en la lumradio —
Ĝis subita malapero*

*En la buŝon dentoplenan,
De vespereto de vespero
Kiu, preterkirliĝante,
Serĉas manĝon el aero.*

*Kvankam lafluganta muso
Prenis mian papilion,
Mi bedaŭras ĝin neniom,
Ĉar mi faris mian ĉion.*

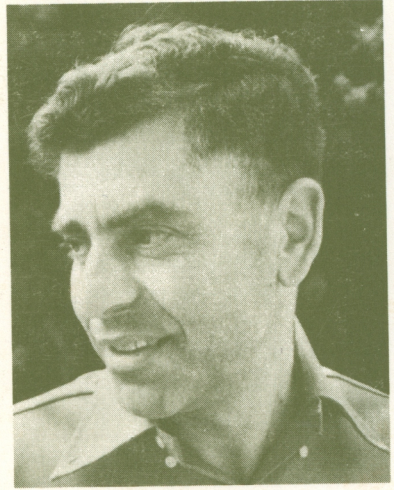
*Mi, sufiĉe grandanime,
Amas ĉiun bestan fraton.
Supozeble la vespereto
Jes, nuligis la malsaton.*

* R. A. L. 1959. *Norda Prismo* 1:30.

\$9.95 *Lewin: Biology of Algae and Other Diverse Verses*

About the Author:

Ralph A. Lewin was educated in England, though he now lives in America and teaches biology and carries on research in various aspects of phycology in the Scripps Institution of Oceanography at La Jolla, California. The *New Yorker* published two of his poems, for which he was paid, and a number of others were published elsewhere, for which he was not paid. (Free verse, so to speak.) He was the co-translator, with Ivy Kellerman Reed, of *Winnie-la-Pu*, the definitive Esperanto edition of the classic by Milne.



Ralph A. Lewin

This volume contains the verses published under the the title *The Biology of Algae and Other Verses* (which has gone out-of-print) plus an equal number of new poems.

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